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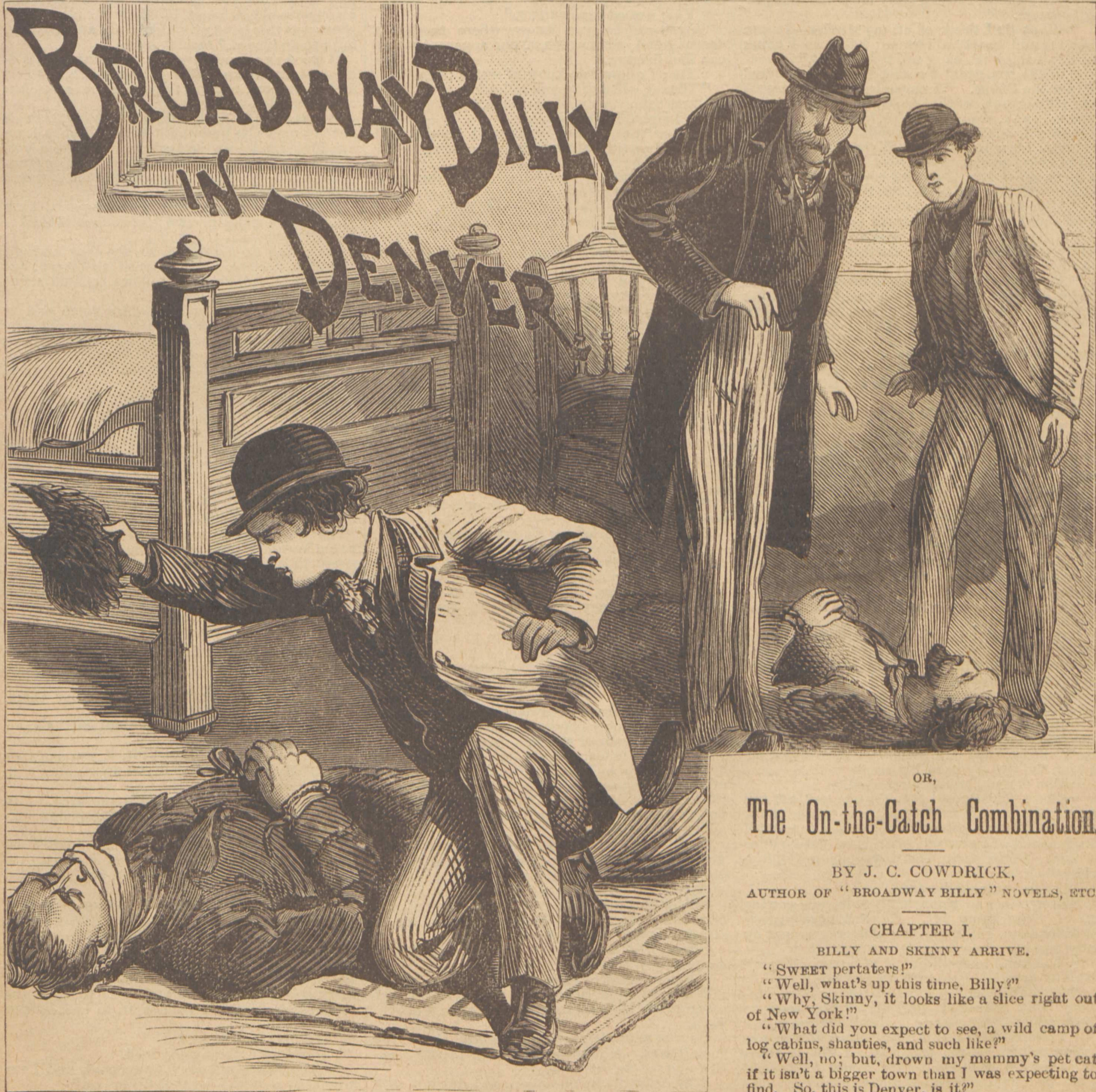
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THE UNSHORN VILLAIN WAS GLARING AT BILLY LIKE A TIGER. THE COMBINATION HAD INDEED STRUCK ILE!

OR, The On-the-Catch Combination.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "BROADWAY BILLY" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

BILLY AND SKINNY ARRIVE.

"SWEET pertaters!"
"Well, what's up this time, Billy?"
"Why, Skinny, it looks like a slice right out of New York!"
"What did you expect to see, a wild camp of log cabins, shanties, and such like?"
"Well, no; but, drown my mammy's pet cat if it isn't a bigger town than I was expecting to find. So, this is Denver, is it?"
Broadway Billy, Skinny—but Skinny no longer—and their old ranger friend.

Coming up from the direction of Manitou, the lads mounted and the old ranger walking, they had here caught their first full view of the city, and stopped.

"Yas; that's what it are, me son," affirmed Roger Watts, or Roger the Rover, in response to Billy's observation; "this heur are Denver, an' a right purty place it are, too."

"Anybody can see that, with half an eye," declared Billy.

For some moments they were silent, gazing upon the beautiful vista that lay open before them.

Beautiful it was—is.

To the north and west were the foot-hills of the giant Rockies, with snow-capped monarchs beyond.

There was Long's Peak, seventy miles to the northwest; Gray's Peak, seventy miles west; while Pike's Peak lay ninety miles to the southwest.

At their feet was the glinting Platte River, flowing through the center of the city; on every hand were beautiful suburban villas; the larger and more important of the city's buildings could be made out clearly; and all in all it was a scene once looked upon not easily forgotten.

"Well, what do you think of it?" Skinny presently asked, rousing Billy from his thoughtful reverie.

"What do I think of it, my slender—I mean my fat and hearty alderman; what do I think of it? I think it's bang up, that's what."

"It are somethin' fer size, I allow," declared Roger the Rover. "I never feel to home in sech big places; but, of course, that won't trouble you lads any, seein' as you're from New York."

"No; I don't believe it will," assured Billy. "I was born in the Sixth Ward, kicked up on Broadway, and had my eyeteeth cut by hard knocks generally. I guess I can hold my own in this town. It's the same with Skinny."

"Yes; I guess ye can, too. Waal, if ye has seen about enough, we'll forge on an' git thar."

"All right, Roger; it won't do to monkey away time here. A little further, and we'll be in town."

"And then good-by to wild adventure," said Skinny. "No more of it for me, for I'm going to stick to the cities after this, you can bet. I've had enough of the wilds."

"I guess I'm ready to agree with you, pard," assented Billy. "We have had our little fling, and now it is about time for us to settle down and cast our anchors to the windward in the business of life."

"And we'll get to New York as soon as we can."

"We must take time to see the place," chided Billy. "It wouldn't do to slight Denver in that style, you know."

"I had as lief go right in and get aboard the train."

"For shame, Skinny! We must see the town, anyhow, and if a bit of detective work comes in our way, we won't throw it over our shoulders, you bet. I'd jest like to show the Denver blues how New York boys can shuck a crook or roast a rogue!"

"I was in hopes you had got over that disease for a little while."

"Got over it! Does a duck decline to swim? Well, hardly! When I get tired of the detective business it will be when Russell Sage asks me to take charge of his puts."

"But, lads, this ain't gettin' on," Roger reminded.

"Right you are," admitted Billy. "It was Skinny's fault, for he's always talking, when he isn't eating, and it's about an even thing between the two diseases, I guess."

"You dry up," Skinny retorted.

"That's something I thought you had set out to do, Skin, but it seems you have given it up, the way you are growing fat. Sweet pertaters! we'll have to fit you out with new clothes once a week, that's sure, the way your are filling these!"

They had started forward.

Skinny, once so remarkably thin, was getting to be remarkably fat. He was now plainly heavier than Billy, and the latter was not by any manner of means a light-weight.

"You 'tend to the fillin' of yer own clothes," Skinny growled, "and I'll see to mine."

"I believe you, my gay and festive prize-winner," Billy answered, smiling. "You seem to be bending every energy in that direction now."

"I almost wish I was thin again, if you are going to keep at me this way. I was in hopes if I ever did round out you would let up and give me a rest, after all you have said."

"Yes; and you will quite wish you were thin again, if you keep on at this rate. You have

rounded out like a Rondout squash, but the trouble is you do not seem to be going to stop rounding. You keep right on. If we had any further to go, Skin, I would suggest a spring for your saddle."

"A spring for my saddle!"

"Yes; so that your horse wouldn't have to carry so much weight."

Roger the Rover enjoyed another of his hearty laughs, at that, which was as amusing to Billy and Skinny as anything could be.

"By the smoke o' Gittysburg," the old ranger presently exclaimed, "it's a wonder the youngster don't rise up an' smite ye, ther way ye tease him. An' he'll do it, too, some o' these days."

"What! Skinny smite me?" cried Billy.

"Yer couldn't blame him if he did, that's sartain."

"But he loves me like a brother, Skinny does, an' he wouldn't do it."

"Waal, we'll let it drop as it are. Now, lads, seein' that we are comin' nigh to our destination, what is goin' ter be done when we gits thar!"

This brought their attention to business at once.

"You say you have been here before," Billy made response.

"Yas; a good many times."

"And maybe you know where there is a decent hotel, where men of our apparent stamp can find lodgin'."

"Yas; I allow I do know of sech a place."

"Theu it will fall to you to lead us to it, that's the first thing on the programme."

"All right, I'll do that."

"After that, Skinny and I will go out and tog ourselves in raiment more befitting to our station in life."

"An' so create a social barrier between us, as it were," Roger complained.

"Nothing of the kind," cried Billy. "You said you are done with the mountains, didn't you?"

"Yas: I allowed I'd go home, seein' that my revenge is had."

"Well, you won't want to go in these old mountain clothes you're wearing now, so we'll all fix out new, spick and span."

"I don't know but you're right, me son, but I won't know how ter act."

"You'll get used to it in a day or two. Then, when we've got fixed up, we'll go to a hotel of a better order, and Skinny and I will look up our baggage. That is awaiting us here in Denver somewhere."

"Well, well, it ain't no use fer me ter try ter tell a lad like you anything. You was born ter command, that's plain, so go right ahead. Skinny, thar is yer leftenant, an' I'm ther rank an' file."

So talking as they moved forward, they were soon in the city.

Suddenly Billy let out his pet exclamation:

"Sweet pertaters!"

"What now?" asked Skinny.

"Here's a Broadway, sure as I live!"

It was even so. By a slight deviation from their course, they had entered upon that thoroughfare.

"Then you'd orter feel quite to home here," remarked Roger.

"I'm at home anywhere," assumed Billy. "Give me a place to hang up my hat, and there I am."

Turning to the left, presently, the streets became more thickly populated, and ere long they were in the heart of the high-up city.

Here Billy felt strangely out of place in his cowboy attire, and was in eager haste to get it off as soon as possible. While the rig was just the thing for the plains and mountains, he was not vainglorious enough to want to pose in it in a city like Denver.

So it was with Skinny, who was even more modest; but not so with the old ranger. He strode boldly along in the middle of the street, ahead of the horses, his old rifle in hand.

Billy was glad when the better part of the city had been passed, and they were again in streets of more modest pretensions.

Roger was leading the way, and finally he came to a stop before a hotel.

A glance satisfied Billy what it was.

It seemed to be a drovers' headquarters, and a big gate a little further on suggested a drove-yard.

He was not mistaken in his guess, either, for such it was. A little knot of men in rough attire was before the door.

Billy drew in to the stoop, and did not stop until the fore feet of his horse were upon the step.

"Hello, in there!" he then called out.

A man, evidently the proprietor, was immediately at the door.

"Any chance heur fer lodgin' fer man an' beast?" Billy made inquiry, in broad dialect.

"Waal, yes; I guess so," was the response. "Drive on down to ther gate thar, an' go in an' put away yer beasts, an' then come in."

Billy and Skinny turned in the direction of the gate, Roger now following; instead of leading.

In the inclosure they dismounted, and Billy gave directions about the care of their animals, putting money into the hands of the hostler.

Then they went back to the hotel, and presented themselves in the bar-room for the purpose of registering their names.

Their advent into the city of Denver had been modest and lowly, but their exit was destined to be of a different sort. Something had recently happened that, in the detective way, was to add another star to Billy's already brilliant crown.

CHAPTER II.

THE PARDS CROSS SWORDS.

DENVER is not an old city. But a generation ago it was only a mount 'n wilderness. Among the oldest houses of which the place could boast was this hotel at which Billy and Skinny with their "pard," had stopped.

It stood as a landmark, representing the childhood of the town, and had never outgrown its first usefulness, but still catered to the same class of patrons as at first.

It was a small, insignificant hostelry, though at the time of its building, it had no doubt been considered quite a grand affair. And even yet it takes away all the greater surroundings, or transport it to a simple mining-camp, and it would appear a palace.

When our trio entered the bar-room, they found there quite a coterie of congenial loafers lounging around.

They had been tall, big, as the new arrivals had heard as they approached the room, but upon their entering the fellows became silent and stared at them.

Billy took a casual survey of the room and its occupants, and stepped to the bar in his easy manner. Some of the fellows cast wistful glances at him, as if wishing he would treat.

"Where's your autograph-album?" he inquired of the beaming landlord.

"My—my what?" the host had to question.

"Why, your register, to be sure," Billy explained.

"Oh! why didn't yer say so?" was the laughing response. "Heu, it is."

From a shelf under the bar he drew forth a worn and aged volume and opened it at a page where a dog-eared blotter protruded.

Billy took up the pen, and first glancing at the names on that page, in a casual way, while he debated how he should sign, struck out boldly and set forth the true names of himself and companions, as follows:

"WILLIAM WESTON,
"JAMES CALLAHAN,
"ROGER WATTS,
{ New York."

As soon as he had finished writing, Billy laid an arm on the register and called the landlord's attention to Skinny.

"I suppose you can see my partner there, can't you, Mr. Landlord?"

Skinny blushed, and the landlord hardly knew how to reply.

"Don't be backward about it, if you can't see him," Billy urged; "but if you do see him, then say so."

"Do I see him?" the landlord repeated. "In course I see him. Why, if anything, he's bigger'n what you be yourself."

"That's it!" cried Billy. "You wouldn't believe how thin that lad was only a short time ago. I knew he was getting fat, but I wanted solid proof of it."

"You had better shut up!" Skinny protested.

"Hold on, now, and hear me out," Billy urged. "Yes; he was the thinnest fellow you ever saw," to the landlord. "The first year of his life he had to be carried in a basket for fear he'd drop apart, and the basket had to be lined with feathers so's his bones wouldn't rub through the skin. You wouldn't believe it, to look at him now."

"Hardly; that's fact."

"Do let up," Skinny enjoined.

"Skinny, it is all on your account, and I am aiming at a point I want to bring out."

"You are taking mighty long aim, that's all I've got to say."

"If that's all you've got to say, then please keep still and hear me out. It is for your good that I am making these statements."

"Bosh!"

The old ranger was grinning from ear to ear. "After the basket era," Billy went on, still addressing the landlord, "then he had to be paddled to make any showing at all as a baby. He was late in walking, for his legs were so small that he wasn't to be trusted on them. You have no idea how thin he really was."

Everybody in the room was all attention now, and Skinny was getting decidedly worked up.

"Yer can't call him thin no longer, anyhow," ventured the landlord.

"That's it," echoed Billy. "That is the point I am coming at. You see, he has always been sc very thin that he was called Skinny, and hardly anybody ever had any other name for him. Now that he is getting stouter, I think he ought be able to wear his real name, don't you?"

"I should think so."

"You see, he had the fever some weeks ago, the mountains, and since then he has been

—ing on meat at a great rate, and it looks out place to be calling him Skinny, though I suppose that name will stick to him in spite of all. inny, beloved pard, I have here given your name to the world for the first time. You

big enough to be entitled to the honor,

ndlord, let me introduce him, not as 'Skinny,'

ut as 'James C.ahan, Esquire,' with the

pect of becoming an alderman from the

th Ward in the near future."

The crowd laughed. Billy was a refreshing

velty to them.

"Are you done now?" Skinny asked.

"Yes; you may have the floor," Billy an-

ered.

"Then, Mr. Landlord, let me chirp once,"

skinny requested. "I admit that I have al-

ays been thin, and that it is only within a few

eks that I have had any meat on my bones to

eak of; but I'd rather be thin than be such a

lower as Billy Westch is. If we stop here a

week you will be talke to death. 'Skinny' has

lways been my handy name, and I don't object

to it now, for it come natural; but hereafter

my pard has got to cal me James—James right

out in full, too; not Jim nor Jimmy, nor Jeems,

nor anything else but James. Roger, you hear

what I say."

The old ranger could suppress his laughter.

"I reckons yer has got him, Skinny—er—I

mean—"

"Go right ahead," skinny granted. "You

may call me Skinny as long as you want to; I'm

James only to Billy, tha's all."

"I reckons yer has got him, then," the old

ranger returned. "He'll be six months tryin'

ter break off ther old habit."

"You had better go slow about that," cau-

oned Billy.

"What can you do about it?" Skinny de-

manded.

"I can make you call me William instead of

Billy."

"Ginger! that will be easy enough. If you

do, though, I'll drop the title you love so well."

"What's that?"

"Broadway. It's easy enough to call you

Broadway Billy, but I'll never try a mouthful

like Broadway William, you bet."

They did not notice that one of the loungers in

the room started at hearing that name men-

tioned. He was a rough-looking fellow, in cow-

boy attire, and seemed to be about half drunk.

A new light gleamed in his eyes, and he

watched Billy closely.

What his interest was we will not stop now to

learn.

As for Billy, he did not take kindly to the

matter of his identity being thus let out so un-

wittingly.

"You can call my name Mud, if you want to," he snapped. "Next time I set out to do you such a kindness you will know it."

He did not let it appear that he was angry,

but assumed an injured air.

"Then don't be so free with your tongue

about me," retorted Skinny.

"You feel important, now that you are big-

ger, don't you?"

"I begin to feel pretty near big enough for

you, anyhow," was Skinny's rejoinder to that.

"Here! here!" chided the old ranger. "You two pards ain't goin' ter git into no muss in my presence, you bet. Orter be 'shamed o' yer selves. Whar would you be, Skinny, only fer yer pard? An' who was you sheddin' tears over, when I fu'st fell in wi' ye, Billy?"

Before the old ranger had ceased speaking the pards had clasped hands.

"We'll call it even," said Billy.

"Yes; providin' you call me James," answered Skinny.

"I'll do it, when I can think of it; I'll call you King James, if you say so. Anything you want."

"No; plain James will do. We'll carry out the joke you commenced, and maybe you won't be so funny in the future."

"I have a suspicion that you are about right," Billy admitted. "I don't feel half as frisky now as I did a dozen years ago, and I suppose when a dozen more have passed I'll be tame enough for Deacon Sage's confidential putter."

The landlord had been scanning the register, dividing his attention between it and the newcomers.

"Yer don't mean ter say you fellers are from New York, do ye?" he now inquired.

"Well, rather," was Billy's response.

The rough-looking cowboy seemed interested anew. Was his interest friendly?

The landlord had laid his folded arms on the bar and was resting upon them, while he surveyed Billy coolly.

"What sort o' joke are ye tryin' ter work on me, young feller," he demanded.

"What do you mean?" Billy asked.

"Of course it ain't none o' my business, but I like to see things hang together."

"Then cast your eyes at Skinny and me," Billy returned. "I guess we have been hangin' together about as long as most o' pards do. What is it you are trying to get at, though?"

The landlord smiled a broad smile.

"Am I on the wrong trail?" Billy asked.

"Why, lad, yer has ther stamp of ther West all over ye, an' still ye has ther narve ter say ye are from New York. It 'muses me."

That the stamp of the West was upon them was true enough, and especially true of the old ranger.

"What has that got to do with the case?" Billy queried. "We are pilgrims in a strange land, that's all; we haven't got the burrs out of our wool yet. You just wait a couple of hours, till we get slicked up a bit, and then see."

The watchful cowboy of the rough aspect smiled as he listened.

"Then you have been some years in ther West, I take it," the inquisitive landlord pursued.

"Well, yes," was Billy's response to that.

"Mr. Watts, here, has been a rover in this land for something like a quarter of a century, while Mr. James Callahan and myself have been here long enough to get case-hardened about the feet. Nevertheless, New York claims us all. See?"

"Oh, yes; I see, now."

CHAPTER III.

BILLY'S SUSPICIONS AND PLANS.

BROADWAY BILLY thought he saw too—he saw that the landlord was likely to keep right on questioning.

It was about time, he thought, to cut him short, if he could do it in an easy way.

"Well, if you see so clearly," he remarked pleasantly, "suppose you show us up to the room we are to occupy. We've had a long ride."

"Sartainly," and the landlord roused up at once. "Been a good spell in ther saddle, hev ye?"

"Yes; a long spell; don't believe I could spell again if I had to."

"Saay," suddenly drawled the attentive cowboy.

Billy's eyes were upon him immediately.

"Well, say it," he invited.

"Didn't your pardner thar call ye Broadway Billy?"

Here was what Billy had been expecting—that some one would recognize the name.

His doings at Manitou had been in the papers, and any one who had read about that affair would not be likely to forget the name so soon.

With his full name, as he had registered, it would be different, for that had been mentioned only casually; the main drift of the adventures, as narrated in the papers, having been centered around "Broadway Billy."

"I believe he did," Billy was prompt to answer.

"An' ain't you ther fellers what found that lost gal?" the man further inquired.

"We seem to be in for it," answered Billy, "so we may as well own up to all our misdeeds at once."

"I thort ye was ther same fellers."

"But, that was nothing," Billy excused. "It was only dumb luck."

"Ther papers don't seem ter look at it that way."

"Sweet pertaters! you don't want to believe all you see in the papers," Billy laughed. "If you do, you will believe too much. Come, Mr. Landlord, have you hit the trail to that room yet?"

"Why, sartain; right this way," and he led off, having first motioned to the man near at hand to take his place at the office.

The trio was conducted to a large room that contained two beds.

"How will this heur fill ther bill?" the hotel man asked.

"First rate," answered Billy. "It couldn't be better."

"Anything I kin do fer ye?"

"No; we'll see you later, when we have got our wind."

"All right; you know whar ter find me. My name's Hodge Ruddle."

The landlord withdrew, closing the door, and Billy slipped the bolt into the socket and hung his hat on the knob to curtain the keyhole.

"That fellow didn't seem to know you, Rover," he then remarked to the old ranger.

"No; fer be ain't ther man what run this ranch when I was heur last time, me son. Ther house must hev changed hands."

"Then you don't feel as much at home as you did?"

"Hardly."

"Do you think this fellow is honest?"

"Hard ter tell. He looks ter be all right."

"Looks don't allus count. What's your opinion, Skinny?"

"Did you speak to me?" asked Skinny, with lazy indifference.

"Of course I did. What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing the matter, only to you my name is James, you know."

Billy had to laugh. He well knew, though, that Skinny was thoroughly in earnest.

"Well, then, James, what do you think about it?"

"I think the landlord is all right," was Skinny's opinion.

They had been speaking in low tones throughout.

"That settles Mr. Ruddle, then," decided Billy. "I have the greatest respect for the opinions of you two gentlemen, and especially when they coincide with my own. Ahem!" Then he added:

"You saw that cowboy fellow who spoke to me? What do you think of him?"

"I'd call him a drunken loafer," declared the ranger.

"What do you say, Skinny—James, I mean?"

Skinny had to grin, while the old ranger laughed heartily.

"I won't go heavy on his honesty," Skinny now made answer.

"That settles it," cried Billy. "I have set that fellow down as a bad egg."

"That don't matter to us, though, so long as he don't interfere with us," remarked the old ranger.

"Just where the pain is," responded Billy. "I'm afraid he don't mean to let us alone."

"What now?" and old Roger's eyes opened wide.

"He's found another mare's-nest," sneered Skinny.

"And you'll be ready with the wet blanket, in proper time, no doubt," was the retort.

his eyes didn't look half as drunk as the rest of him seemed to be."

"Smoke o' Gittysburg, but you has sharp eyes," muttered the ranger.

"And now here's the final chapter," Billy concluded: "Don't it strike you that this fellow looks like that Pinon Pete we had the difficulty with down there at Manitou?"

"Thar!" exclaimed the ranger, clapping his hand down upon his knee with force, "that's it! I knowed I'd seen a shadder o' that face afore."

"You are right," acknowledged Skinny, promptly.

"He looks enough like Pinon Pete to be his brother."

"Now we are getting at the point of the thing," Billy summed up. "This man isn't what he seems. He looks like Pinon Pete. Now, suppose he is a brother to that rascal, he's our mortal enemy. No getting around that, I opine."

"Right," agreed the others.

"That being the case, we must watch till we get proof one way or the other."

"You is talkin' sound sense, lad," averred the ranger. "We mustn't let him give us a dig in the back if we can help it, for that might be his game."

"Well, the only way to prevent that is to watch him, and you are just the man for that business, Roger."

"Me!" in great surprise. "Why, he'd know me on sight, sure as guns."

"That's where our fine work must come in."

"I don't see how."

"Will you try it, if I show you the way?"

"Try it! I'll try anything for you, Billy, an' you know it."

"All right; just listen to the oracle. You leave your old rifle and other traps here in the closet. There's a lock to it, you see. Then you go out, get shaved clean and a good deal of that hair taken off, and rig yourself out in new duds from crown to toe."

"Smoke o' Gittysburg!" the ranger ejaculated.

"What's the matter?"

"Why, yer lays out a week's work as though it could be done in ten minutes."

"It can be done in an hour, neat as wax," Billy assured. "Leave everything here that you want to keep, so that you will not have anything to hamper you, and give away your old duds where you buy your new ones. See?"

"An' what will you be doin' while I'm gone?"

"We'll stay here. You know Denver better than we do. No danger of your being followed. Go right out, bold as a big brave, and when you come back into the bar-room a good deal bolder. Not much fear that they'll recognize you, so step right up to the bar and ask for a room, and register as Jackson Jenks. Can you remember all that?"

The old ranger's head was in a whirl, almost, but he was into the thing with his younger "pards," heart and soul, and was ready to do anything.

"I reckons I kin try," he said. "Can't no more'n make a mess of it, anyhow."

They planned further, and when a clear and full understanding had been arrived at, the old ranger set out upon his mission.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTERY OF A MURDER.

ON the northwest corner of Fourteenth and Larimer streets, Denver, stands the City Hall, which is the headquarters of all city officers. It is an imposing building, with a tall tower in the front center, under which is the main entrance. Midway up the tower is a town clock. Each front corner of the building presents a sharp hip, serving to relieve the sameness of the mansard and at the same time lending symmetry to the whole.

In the rear is what appears to be an extension. Here are other entrances, and also another tower, this one supporting a pole and flying the national emblem. The building, as a whole, makes a picture pleasing to the eye.

About the time when our trio were holding their conference in the little inn, a man of middle age came out of the police department in the big building. His face wore an expression of sadness; he walked with bowed head, and seemed to be in deep grief.

With hands clasped behind his back, he turned down the street and moved slowly away.

"They can tell me nothing yet," he muttered to himself, as he proceeded. "I wonder if the mystery is never to be cleared away!"

He was silent a moment.

"Four days have passed," he resumed, "and

the detectives are baffled completely. They talk of clews, of suspicions, of progress, of developments, of everything under the sun but facts. They can't tell me who killed my daughter!"

He clinched his fists in his excitement, and dashed his arms downward with force.

"No; they don't tell me that!" he grated.

He strode forward with increased energy, his face working with the conflicting emotions he felt within.

"Oh!" he presently almost moaned, "it is killing me, killing me! Why can't they point out to me the slayer of my child—my beautiful Gertrude? How quickly I would speed a bullet to find his vile heart!"

Silence again.

He spoke by fits and starts, as it were.

"I will see Brandland once more, and if he has nothing for me—What then? I dare not think. How long can I stand the terrible strain? And to-morrow my child, my only one, must be buried—"

His voice broke at last, and tears streamed from his eyes.

People passing noticed him, but he heeded them not. Few could understand the depth of his sorrow.

Now and then one would recognize him, pointing him out to others, and a group would stare at him until he had passed, but he did not see them.

Passing on down the street, he turned a corner after awhile, and by the time he had overcome his emotions he had reached his destination.

Turning into an open doorway, he ascended the stairs that filled the width of the entrance.

He was no stranger here, evidently, for he did not pause to look at the directory.

The name he had mentioned was there, among others:

DESMOND BRANDLAND,
Private Detective

When the sorrowing gentleman stopped, it was at a door bearing that name, and he barely stopped, either, but went right in.

At a desk by a window sat the man he wanted to find, and he called him by name at once.

"Brandland, for Heaven's sake tell me something!" he demanded.

"Would to Heaven that I could, Mr. Cottrell," was the earnest answer.

"Tuen the murderer has not yet been discovered?"

"Nor even a clew to him," was the yet more depressing assurance.

The sorrowing gentleman groaned.

"It is a baffling case," added the detective.

"Have you been to the police to-day?"

"I have just come from there."

"And they—"

"Nothing."

"You see it is a deep mystery. None of us can get a starting-point. No one can point a suspicion to direct us."

"My confidence in detectives is about gone, Brandland."

"Nor can I blame you. I am disgusted with myself and all my fellows, to see how this case drags. Here it is four days since the crime was discovered."

"Four days that have seemed like four ages to me."

"I cannot wonder at it. Let us go over the whole matter in detail once more. We may bring something new to light—give some suggestion."

"What is the use of it? It will make the third time, if we do."

"No matter. Now, I will go over the ground, and if I make any mistake, or omit anything, prompt me."

"Go ahead."

The caller leaned back in his chair wearily.

"Pay attention. Marvin Cottrell, yourself, a private banker and broker of No. —— street, missed your daughter from her home on the morning of the twelfth. It gave you much concern, and on leaving the house for your office you left word for notice to be sent to you as soon as your daughter returned. You—"

"Hold on, hold on," Mr. Cottrell interrupted. "Let me tell it myself. I hate your brief summing of a matter that is taking the life out of me every moment. I will rehearse it for you, since you think it must be done."

The detective smiled. This seemed to be what he had wanted to bring about.

"Very well, go ahead," he consented. "You can tell it better than I, I know, and be sure of omitting nothing."

"You have stated my name and business," the sorrowing man began. "I will go on from

that. I am a widower, and live with my daughter, having a housekeeper and servants. On the night in question I was not at home. I was spending the night with a friend, as has been shown. After breakfast with my friend, I hastened home to see that all was well there, and to let my daughter know that I was all right."

"That is better; go on."

"Arriving at my house, what was my amazement when told that my child had not been seen; that she was not in her room; that she had not slept in her bed. I was almost crazed at once, for I loved my child as I love my life—Pah! the comparison is odious! I loved her above everything. I questioned the household. It was shown that my daughter had had no callers during the evening, and had gone to her room at an early hour.

"Yes, yes," encouragingly.

"At the regular hour the house was closed, and it was found properly closed and secured in the morning. Upon that point the housekeeper is positive. She had no suspicion that my child was out until the maid went to the room at her usual hour and found the state of affairs as I have stated. This was only a short time before I arrived. I sent messengers at once to the places where I thought my daughter might possibly be, leaving word that they must notify me the moment she was found. You see, after the first shock, I had no real fear that bodily harm had come to her, and having business that demanded my earliest attention at the office, I went there."

"All of which has been shown and proven," put in the detective. "Your non-attention to that business, upon making the awful discovery, has resulted in the loss of several thousand dollars to you."

"Don't mention that," cried Mr. Cottrell, with an impatient wave of the hand. "I would give every dollar I am worth, could that bring my child to life."

"No one doubts it, sir."

Mr. Cottrell was now upon his feet and pacing the floor nervously.

"Well," he resumed, with fierce earnestness, "I reached the office, and on the way, with my business in mind, the matter of my daughter's absence was partly blotted out for the time. As I walked I framed my plans, and knew just what orders to give to my clerks the moment I entered. When I reached the office, however, and saw that only one window was open, and that the shutters had not been removed from the door, a chill went through me. I do not know what I thought or imagined. My daughter's absence and this seemed to be connected.

"I ran up the steps and fairly bounded into the room. I know my face must have been white. It felt cold as ice to me. There in the outer room was a crowd, and behind the rails I caught sight of the hats of some policemen. My three clerks were there, with faces like death. I wonder that I kept my feet, for I felt sick at heart, and know that I must have been on the point of fainting."

The banker was now speaking wildly, frantically.

The detective eyed him with the keenest interest, studying his every word and movement well.

"Can you imagine it?" Mr. Cottrell suddenly demanded, stopping in front of the seated detective. "Can you put yourself in my place for that moment?"

"I fear not," was the answer.

"I know you can not!" was the almost fierce cry. "It is impossible for me to repeat the reality in imagination. I knew that something had happened—What?"

"You could not suspect the awful truth."

"How could I? There was not the delay of a second, however. No sooner was I in the room than I demanded to know what had happened, and pushed my way fiercely into the inclosed part, knocking men this way and that, and then—Oh! my God!"

He stopped, his head dropped, and tears ran from his eyes anew.

The detective waited, waited patiently for the storm of grief to spend its force.

Minutes passed before the broken man could speak again. He made no effort to speak until he had command of his voice once more.

Presently he resumed.

"There on the floor lay my daughter, my beautiful daughter, my peerless Gertrude; blood covering her fair young breast, and she was dead. A cruel bullet had torn its way to her heart!"

With a groan the stricken father fell into the nearest chair, covering his face with his hands.

The detective knew he could say no more. He took up the thread himself.

"Your daughter was dead," he repeated; "and further, the safe was open and its valuable contents gone."

"Never mind the robbery," cried Mr. Cottrell. "Only show me the wretch who killed my child!"

"The facts go hand in hand," reminded the detective. "Finding one, we have both. There is no doubt that one person did both deeds."

"But, why can't he be found?" the banker cried. "How much longer is this to go unavenged! Only show him to me! Only prove to me that you have the right man! Only let me see him, and—"

His very fierceness choked him, and he did not finish the threat he had meant to utter.

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE MYSTERY.

THE detective remained silent—waiting for the storm to pass again, before speaking.

Mr. Cottrell made an effort to control his emotions, and presently could do so.

"So far," said the detective, then, "we have dealt with facts."

"Terrible facts," Mr. Cottrell emphasized.

"And having gone over the facts, let us now give some attention to theories."

"I hate your theories!" cried Mr. Cottrell. "We have had too many of them already, and what have they amounted to?"

"Nothing, I am forced to admit; but such work is never lost. A clew is likely to appear at any moment, from some insignificant fact that has been overlooked, and which only speculation can bring out."

"Well, speculate, then; do anything, if there is a ray of hope in it."

"You have told me that you know of no reason why your daughter should go to your office at night."

"The same old questions!"

"I have some new ones to ask, however. You have also stated that your daughter had no means of gaining entrance into the bank."

"She positively had no such means."

"And the only person who had, besides yourself, was John Bowcross, your head clerk?"

"Yes."

"It has been satisfactorily proven that he did not visit the bank after closing hours, on that fatal night, and you did not. Who, then, is the person who opened not only the door of the bank, but the safe as well?"

"That is the mystery."

"You are sure there are no other keys besides those you and your clerk carry, are you?"

"I thought I was sure, before this terrible thing happened."

"You have said that your keys were in your possession that night, and Bowcross has proved that his were with him."

"Yes, yes."

"A word about Bowcross. He is a married man, and has been with you for years. You trust him as you trust yourself. On this fatal night one of his children was very ill. He was up nearly all the night, and by several witnesses has made his *alibi* perfect."

Mr. Cottrell nodded.

"It was Bowcross who made the discovery," the detective went on. "It so unnerved him that he had not recovered from the shock yet. Was there any reason why John Bowcross should rob and kill your child, Mr. Cottrell?"

Mr. Cottrell sprung to his feet, and looked at the detective with dilated eyes.

"Heavens!" he gasped. "You might as well suspect me of the crime!"

"Well, then, that settles John Bowcross," said Brandland, quietly. "Still, he was one who had keys to the office; you yourself the other. Now, let us look in another direction. Was there any reason why your daughter should rob you?"

"Are you a lunatic?" cried Mr. Cottrell, savagely.

"I hope not. Let us reason the thing out if we can. Your daughter left the house very secretly, after she was supposed to have retired. No one knew she was out. We know only too well where and how she was found. Now, why did she go out so secretly, and go to your office? And how did she gain entrance to the office when she got there? Puzzling points."

"And likely to remain so. What are you going to learn, sitting here in your office?"

"Every man I have is on the case, sir, and they may be in to report at any moment."

"What are they doing? Speculating upon theories?"

The detective was a little nettled at this, but remained cool.

"One, for instance," he answered, "is giving his attention to your daughter's friends and acquaintances. She did not go to that office at night without some powerful motive."

"I am aware of that."

"Can it be possible that she expected to find you there?"

"No; decidedly. On the contrary, she knew I was going to spend the night with my friend."

"Then that would give her a grand opportunity to pay a secret visit to the bank, would it not?"

"I can't deny it; but, what under heavens took her there?"

"There are other questions fully as mysterious as that, I think."

"What are they? I fail to see them."

"We know all that was found upon your daughter was a tiny pocketbook, with a trifling sum of money in it, and a handkerchief."

"That was all."

"Your housekeeper has testified that she closed up the house, as usual, after your daughter had retired. You have said all the doors were bolted as well as locked. The housekeeper has said they were so found on this morning. Now, how did your daughter expect to get back into the house again?"

Mr. Cottrell was now staring with intense interest.

"I had not thought of that," he declared.

"Nor did the coroner think of it," said the detective. "It is a thought that came to me this morning. Perhaps your daughter had no intention of going back to the house. Maybe it was, after all, suicide."

"Bosh! Do you imagine a merry girl like Gertrude, who had everything to live for, would take her life? Nonsense."

"It does not look reasonable, and everything is against it. She was shot from a distance of some feet at least, and no weapon was found near her. You speak of her as a merry girl; was she always so?"

A frown came over the banker's face.

"You bring to mind that I have seen her unaccountably sad at times, without any reason to offer for being so."

"Your daughter held a secret, Mr. Cottrell."

The bereaved father smiled sadly.

"She had no secrets from me," he declared confidently.

"All the appearances go to show that she had, nevertheless," Brandland insisted.

"What do you imagine her secret can have been?"

"That is going further than human eyes can penetrate," was the response. "I cannot guess it; hence I must ferret it out if I can."

"And that is what you are trying to do?"

"It is."

"I think you are a long ways from finding out the mystery of the matter," Mr. Cottrell sighed.

"Your confidence in your daughter, sir, is commendable, and I honestly hope that I may be wrong in my guess. May she not have held some secret she would keep from you out of love for you?"

"I can't imagine what it would be."

"Are you quite sure you are not holding something back yourself?"

"I am positive on that head. I have told you everything concerning the case as plainly and as clearly as I know how."

"Well, Mr. Cottrell, let me unfold a page of your history for you. You came here from New York about thirty years ago. You went into business right at the start of Denver's boom, and have seen your dollars double almost faster than you can count. You married here, when you had been here about ten years, and this daughter was born to you about nineteen years ago."

This was a plain statement of facts, and the banker listened to it in a weary manner.

"Before coming to Denver, however, you had been married, and—"

The banker started, and was all interest now.

"How have you learned that?" he demanded.

"By making inquiry," was the answer. "I make it my business to leave no spot untouched in a matter of this kind. You had been married before, but for good reason you left your wife and came West. Do you know what became of that woman and her boy?"

"I neither know nor care," was the answer, in a fierce way.

"And yet, just there may lie the secret of this terrible tragedy that has taken place."

"Heavens!"

"You see it now, do you?"

"Can it be possible that that woman—"

"Or her son—*your* son—"

"Not *my* son, by heavens!"

"I agree with you, if the information I have received is correct. Well, I am turning my attention that way, and hope to discover something to bear out my theory. That child, if living, must be a man of thirty years now."

"About that."

"And the woman?"

"Fifty, at least."

"Now, sir, think hard! Have you, at any time, seen any woman here in Denver who reminded you of that other?"

"Never."

"About the boy it is useless to ask, for you would not know him; but has any man, of about the age in question, at any time crossed your path?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Have you ever had letters from these persons?"

"Never. I believe the woman never heard of me after I left her."

"You may be right; you may be wrong. Some things I am sure of: that your man Bowcross is not the person, nor is either of your other clerks. I have no suspicion against any of them."

"I am glad of that. I feared you did suspect poor Bowcross. I love him as if he were a son."

"No; in my mind there is nothing against either of them. I have shown you, though, how important it is to bring out everything possible. You did not connect that old marriage of yours with this case, did you?"

"I certainly did not."

"Tell me, then, are there any other facts connected with the past which may have bearing upon the present?"

"You must give me time to think," was the response. "It is evident that the police have not learned what you have, so far."

"They will probably have the information before another day passes. No doubt they are after it, for I do not claim to be any smarter than other men."

"Well, give me time to think," said Mr. Cottrell, rising. "I will see you after the funeral. Remember, I live only to avenge my child. My office shall never be opened for business again."

CHAPTER VI.

BILLY LEARNS THE GREAT SENSATION.

THE "Cottrell Case," as it was known, was the sensation of the city.

Nothing had ever created a greater stir in police and detective circles, and it was the mystery of the hour.

Police detectives and all others, whether directly engaged upon it or not, were taking a hand in the matter, each man being eager to be the one to solve the terrible enigma.

The details of the case need not be dwelt upon; the foregoing chapters have made it sufficiently clear for immediate purposes.

Our interest being mainly with Broadway Billy and his pards, let us return to them.

When Roger Watts set out from the hotel, Billy and Skinny talked over the situation.

Whether there was danger ahead or not, they felt better in taking due precautions against any.

They talked for a time, and presently Skinny uttered an exclamation, and hit his fist hard upon the sill of the window.

"Great ginger!" he ejaculated.

"What is it now?" inquired Billy.

"I thought somethin' was wantin', Billy."

"Well, what is it? Hope nothin' has bu'sted."

"Why, we haven't had anything to eat!" Skinny exclaimed.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Billy. "It is surprising that you haven't thought of that before."

"Ain't you hungry, too?" Skinny asked.

"Come to think of it, I believe I am a little that way," Billy admitted.

"And there we let Roger go off without anything on his stummick. He'll be sick."

"Foolish if he is," declared Billy. "There's no indications of a famine in Denver, and I guess he'll fill up if he feels the pangs."

"But that won't help us any. Let's go down and scout around."

"I'm with ye, shoulder to shoulder."

They left the room, locking the door, and returned to the bar-room.

"Say, Mr. Ruddle," Billy saluted the landlord, "we made a mistake, and want to make it right."

"Is that so?"

"Yes; you asked us if there was anything more we wanted, and we never thought of grub. We think we can go a snack of that article."

"Somethin' ter eat, hey?" the landlord drawl-

ed. "I guess I kin fix ye out, if yer is willin' ter take it cold. Ye see, ye are too late for dinner, an' too early for supper."

"We'll take it cold, an' raw, too, if need be," Billy assured. "This pard of mine is about as near starved as he can be. You wouldn't think it, ter look at him, but it's so. You never saw a feller eat like he does since he had that fever."

"Reckon I know somethin' about that meself. I have been thar, an' it leaves a feller about empty, fer a fact."

"Have you got a scales handy?" asked Billy, soberly.

"No; what d'ye want a scales fer?"

"Some blame foolishness," chipped in Skinny.

"Nothing foolish about it, Skinny, dear," assured Billy. "I want to be honest with our host, that's all."

"And can't ye be honest without a scales?" Skinny asked, wondering what was coming, yet knowing that it must be some joke in which he must figure.

"I don't see how we can," Billy answered thoughtfully. "Ye see, Ruddle, this pard of mine is a terrible eater, an' I don't know how you are goin' ter gauge how much he really does put under his shirt unless you weigh him before he begins and weigh him again when he stops."

This seemed to strike the landlord as being particularly funny, and he set up a hearty laugh.

While Billy was rattling off the above, he allowed his eyes to wander over the group of men seated around.

He was in search of the rough-looking cowboy against whom his suspicion had been aroused, and found that he was still there.

"I reckon we won't go ter that pains, will we, pard," the landlord said to Skinny. "A feed is a feed, big or little, and the price is the same to all."

"That isn't hardly a square deal, as the bald-headed man said to the barber."

"What did he say?" queried the inquisitive Ruddle.

"Why, the bald-headed man had his hair cut, the little he had, and the barber charged him full rate. The bald-headed party remarked that he considered his case ought to be allowed cut rates. If you don't see the p'int, I'll give you a diagram after I fill in."

"The only difference is," observed Skinny, "that here we are charged *full* rates. The price is the same, whether the "full" is little or big, you see."

"Better be careful," warned Billy. "Don't try to get off such heavy ones now, with the extra burden you have taken upon yourself to carry."

"What do ye mean now?"

"Yer name."

"Yes; that reminds me; see that you call me James."

"But, about that grub, Mr. Ruddle: have you struck the trail yet?" Billy reminded.

He had discovered that the landlord was more attentive to gossip and small talk than he was to business.

"Sartainly!" he declared. "Come right this way, me lads, an' I'll see that ye don't starve, even if it is cold wittles."

Motioning to his handy-man to take his place, he led the way to the dining-room of his establishment.

There, having seated his guests, and having put a newspaper before them to engage their attention while they waited, he went further to give orders concerning them.

Billy took up the paper when the landlord had left the room, and glanced at it.

Suddenly Skinny saw his eyes fly open with interest, which was immediately followed with: "Sweet pertaters!"

The headlines of the Cottrell matter had caught his eye.

"What is it?" Skinny asked.

"The fever is on me, Skinny, hot!" was the response.

"Oh, mercy," Skinny groaned. "Don't forget that my name is James, all the same, though," he added.

"I don't care if it's James James," was Billy's response. "Jest lend yer ears to this."

With that, he read aloud the glaring and thrilling headlines.

"I guess that is a case, sure enough," Skinny agreed.

"A case!" Billy exclaimed. "I should say it was! I'd call it the toughest tangle yet."

"And no use your tryin' it."

"No use?"

"No."

"And why not?"

"Cause it's too hefty fer ye."

"Get out! With you an' Roger ter back me, I'll bet I kin stir up some sort of a warm chase."

"And git inter trouble, like ye allus do," Skinny complained.

"I thought the wet blanket would come around after awhile," said Billy.

"Well, read all of it, and see what it has to say, anyhow," Skinny requested, eagerly.

"Ha! feel a touch of the fever yourself, do ye?"

Skinny had to smile an admission.

"No time ter read it now," said Billy. "I'll freeze onto the paper, though, and we'll get at the bottom facts as soon as we go to our room."

"All right."

The landlord returned.

"A spread will soon be ready fer ye," he announced. "Don't be afeerd ter lay inter it."

"You bet," responded Skinny.

When the landlord had gone, Billy folded the paper and thrust it into his pocket, and soon after the edibles were forthcoming.

Skinny ate with his usual hearty appetite, and Billy was not much behind him when they stopped.

Most of the plates had been denuded of their contents.

As they passed through the bar-room, after their repast, Billy remarked to his host:

"That was about as good as a square meal, anyhow. I was satisfied, but I had to choke my partner off to save the dishes. He'll get even with ye at supper, I have no doubt. Better hustle round and get a scales, as I mentioned."

The landlord had some response to offer, to which Skinny had something to say on his own account, and they left the bar-room and went up-stairs.

As soon as they had entered the room and closed the door, they took their places at the window, and Billy read aloud a full account of the mysterious murder of the banker's daughter.

"Sweet pertaters!" he exclaimed, as soon as he came to the end of it, "but that takes the cake, don't it, pard? It is on a par with the best detective story we ever bent our minds to when we used to waste the midnight tallow in that way. Here is work for us, my alderman-to-be, and don't ye mistake it!"

"You don't mean to say you are really going to bother with it, do ye?" Skinny soberly inquired.

"Sweet pertaters!" exclaimed the young disciple of Pinkerton, "do you think I'd let a chance like this slip by? I guess not, while I can scout 'round and hunt fer clews with ther rest of 'em."

"I'll be mighty thankful when we get to New York, anyhow," muttered Skinny.

"Why will ye, pard?"

"Because, then the responsibility of takin' care of you will be off my hands. I'll turn ye over to yer mammy, and that will settle it."

Billy was serious in an instant.

"Skinny," he said, "our first business must be to find the post-office and get our letters, and our next business must be to write home."

"I agree with ye," cried Skinny, letting the name pass for the once. "Business before pleasure, always; and maybe by that time this matter will be cleared up, and they won't need your help."

And so they talked.

Meantime, below, no sooner had they left the bar-room than the landlord took a look into the dining-room, and returning, said to the rough-looking cowboy:

"Yas; they took ther paper with 'em."

"I thort they would," was the response, grimly spoken.

CHAPTER VII.

BILLY AND SKINNY'S DEBATE.

ACCORDING to their plans, the lads were not to leave the hotel until their friend the ranger returned.

They were to watch for him from the window, and an agreed-upon signal was to be exchanged so that there might be no mistake.

So, while they waited, they talked about the Cottrell Case, speculating upon it with the amount of light upon the matter the newspaper had given them.

"I tell ye it's a tough tangle to tackle," Billy declared. "The more I put my mind to it, the more it puzzles me. My fever is gettin' right up to the hundred, just as fast as it can."

"It's jest so tough that I don't think ye had better tackle it at all," the lieutenant expressed opinion.

"Not tackle it! Bless yer big heart, Skinny—James, I mean: if I let this go by without tryin' my hand at it I could never look the Inspector

in the face when we get home! with my going into it, Skin— Jim— d servants. your new name! I'm going into it at home. a buckle, and don't forget it," end, as has

"Well, I hope it won't be the n friend, I your neck dislocated, that's a ere, and Skinny.

"But it sticks me, hang me if it don mused. "If I only had some brains in m ze masheen, like other folks, I might do some en: used."

"It seems to stump the whole lot of not reminded Skinny.

"That's so, come to think of it. Wis' h! answer a few questions, Skinny, pard." love

"James, if you please," Skinny remi was

"Hang James!" growled Billy. "I dur used to it."

"You'll have to, for I mean it. Ski fit me any more, ye see."

"I have ter admit that, my gay a losed, alderman; but I can't get James to fit m red in nohow."

They were indulging freely in my child and most natural manner of talk. m at her of the street was their mother tongu airs as I

"And besides that, I'm getting le before when I've got a real name to lay clai to the been thinkin' a good while of spea ght pos about it, but hated to."

"Well, why didn't ye do it?" after the "Oh, I knew you'd only poke s ly harm fun at me."

"Sweet pertaters! It hits me th take care of yerself in that line now."

"Oh, I can't begin to keep up w prove," use talking. What I think about it that I'm getting on towards twenty-o scovery, yourself, and that name don't fit me nd dol to."

"I agree with ye, Skinny, but—" Cottrell,

"James, if you please." id. "I

"Sweet pertaters! did I say Shuld that time?"

"Sure ye did."

"Then I might as well give right up, pacing never get used to it. Can't we dr estness,

"Nary a line," Skinny firmly held with my has got to be James, same as I said ghter's won't be hard with ye first off; on ne. As 'mind ye of it when ye go wrong."

"Well, if ye mean it, I s'pose I'll ha ment I the best I can. What was we talkin' ab ever, how?"

"Bout that murder case."

"Sure. I wanted you to answer a f know tions."

"What are they?"

"Well, f'rinstance, why did that ga into her dad's office that night?" been

"Saay, what do ye take me for?" den Skinny. "Do ye think I'm a Sixth ails I seer, the seventh son of a seven sisters, o thin' of that sort?" My leath.

Billy had to laugh.

"Well, maybe that was hitting you in the hard the first shot," he said. "I will gi an easier one this time. Tell me who fi frangshot that cut her off in the bloom of yo it were."

"You'd orter be 'shamed ter speak of light."

"Well, I am. But that don't answer a lly question."

"And I'll never answer it."

"Too hard yet, eh? Well, here's one e. Who was it opened the bank and the door safe?"

"Give it up."

"So do I. Skinny, it's a tangle that is ter make the boys put on their thinkin' afore they are done with it. One fact is I enough, none of 'em has got hold of ther ry of end yet."

"That's the way it looks, 'cordin' to the paper's story."

"And newspapers never lie," declared Bi soberly. "If you see it in the newspaper, ran so, and that settles it. No: they haven't at the right end of the tangle yet, and I know I'm goin' ter start on a p'int that none of 'em has thought of yet."

"Great ginger! You don't set up ter smarten all the police and detectives in Den ver, do ye!"

"Sweet pertaters! no!" responded Billy, wi like force. "I don't say this idee of mine is th right one, do I?"

"Well, no, that's so."

"It's like a lottery, ye see. No tellin' wher the prize is comin' out, an' my chance may be to good as the rest."

"What is this idee of yours, then?"

"I have been givin' my brains a rest while

kin' ter you, my gay an' festive
The detective situation meant, if ye find any-
He took up the xical about that; and while my
"Your daug'stin' I was runnin' these different
"and further, 'n' mind. Now, it seems that the
ble contents ~ the bank has proved a clear case.

"Never ~ it altogether."
trell. "C, he is proved clear."

my chil' we know it wasn't his keys that opened
"The tank, because he was seen ter use 'em ter
detecti and amuse the sick child durin' the night."

There Clear as a whistle, so far."
deeds." Well, then, why in the dickens don't they

"But after the other set of keys a little closer?"
cried. "don't mean to say that Mr. Cottrell had

venged! ~d in it?"
to me the set pertaters! no!" cried Billy, imitating
me see hisprise. "But, they have got only his bare

His ver, or it that his keys were in his possession
finish the it."

a't that enough?"

may be for the rest of 'em, but it ain't

THE for me."

THE detective a deeper thinker than anybody else,
storm to pas s the reason. Your skull will bu'st

Mr. Cottrell these days."

emotions, a'k ye for the compliment, pard; but I

"So far, 'ow my head ter swell. All my idees
dealt with i chance; there's no deep thinkin' ter get

"Terrible."

"And he, how do you mean to go to work to find
give some a her Mr. Cottrell lies about it or not?"

"I hate i your growin' soul, Skinny—I mean
"We have I don't believe he does lie. He's as in-

what have s you be. Never heard of a case of a

"Nothin' irderin' his own daughter, do ye? I

work is not."

at any m'd what in the world are ye drivin' at?"
that has be. this; I want ter know all about what

lation can . Cottrell away from home on that par-

"Well, s night; fer that murder business wasn't
is a ray of use of a minnit, an' you kin bet on it."

"You ha' is diggin' deep," admitted Skinny.
son why do ye know it wasn't the impulse of a

at night," though, as you poetically express it."

"The s 'new!' Billy whistled, "you beat me that

"I hav' Why, if it had been the— No, I won't
have also it that way. If it had been done without

means of on aforethought, ahem! it would have ap-

"She pi on sight why the girl went to the office."

"And :tention aforethought is good," commented

self, was y. "I can't agree with ye on the point at

"Yes, though."

"It ha'al that's good, too. But, why can't you
not visit with me?"

fatal nig' the girl's doings don't argue any more for

person 'de than for the other."

bank, to beg ter differ, pardner. Do yer think she

"Th t to the bank a-purpose to be killed? Hard-

"Yo An' it's plain she didn't kill herself. Be-

those y's, how was she going to get back into the

"I 'se again?"

thing. Hang it," muttered Skinny, "you are argu-

"Yo right on my side of the question now, Billy,

possess."

that bi How do ye make that out?"

"Y She didn't go to the bank expectin' ter be

"A ed, an' so it was done on ther unexpected.

man, 'she didn't go there to kill herself, fer she

trust i'd 'a done that at home. Then, as ter how

night was goin' ter get into the house— Saay—"

up ne 'Ha! smell a mice do ye?"

has n "Somebody in the house had something to do

Mr ith it."

"I "That is ther way it looks, sure; fer if she

the ent out on the sly she didn't go without leavin'

that way to get back in again. If she left sech a

Was 'ay it was shut off, unless somebody tells lies,"

rob: "That's the sticker," complained Skinny,

M thoughtfully. "We can't tell how many royal

the clars are loose in the case. That is what baffles

"ustice a good many times in these days of diffi-

sultties and tribbylations, as you used to say."

" Billy patted his partner on the back rather

said vigorously.

"Don't choke," he cautioned. "The bigger

oth you grow the more voluminous your vocabulary

Wa seems to get."

rot: Skinny pretended to faint at that.

With all their horse-play, however, they did

not fail to keep watch for Roger's return.

"It's a big case," Billy declared, "and I

ca agree with you that it is a good deal too hefty

for me, Skinny—I mean Jeemsey. It will take

or all three of us, and we will have to buckle right

down to it, even then."

"Well, I'm with ye now, red hot," Skinny de-

clared.

"Ha! I thought I could warm you up to it!"

laughed Billy.

"I want to know all about it, now that I've

got this much," Skinny declared.

"That's the fever!" cried Billy. "That's a

sure sign that you've got it. Well, give me

your hand, and we'll know more or bu'st, that's all."

They shook hands on it.

"There's somethin' rotten," cried Billy, "and it ain't in Denmark, either. It's right here in Denver. This case wouldn't be so mighty mysterious if it wasn't a mighty deep one, and that I'll bet my boots on. It's either as deep as a well, or so shaller that everybody is lookin' clear over the truth. Skinny, we're in fer it, sure, an' I hope we'll win."

"James, if you please," reminded Skinny. "I'll let it pass this time, though. Yes; it's deep, and we may find it a good deal deeper before we get done with it. Our work has been all talk so far. Action is somethin' different altogether. If it is deep, as you think it is, then there's desperate rascals at the bottom of it, and if they get hold of us there will be no hope for us, you bet."

"But they haven't got us yet, and what's more, they won't, if— Hello! isn't that Rover comin' there?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD RANGER PLAYS DETECTIVE.

TIME had passed rapidly; their watch was re-warded.

They had not felt the time drag, so earnestly had they been discussing the murder.

Skinny looked quickly where Billy pointed, and there the Rover came, as they both believed, though they could not be sure yet.

And such a change!

Both the pards laughed heartily at his appearance.

"Great ginger!" ejaculated Skinny, "is it him, fer a fact?"

"Guess it is," responded Billy. "Get onto the coat, will you!"

At that moment the man glanced up at the window, and seeing the lads there, gave the signal.

The signal was to drop his handkerchief and pick it up again, and it was done as naturally as could be.

"That's him!" exclaimed Billy. "He ain't no slouch, is he?"

"Not a bit!" cried Skinny. "Ginger! but ain't he togged some!"

"I should say so. Hang me if I would have known him, at a glance, if we hadn't been looking for him."

"Nor me. Say, let's get down to the bar-room and see him come in. We've got just time enough to do it, and no more."

Billy's answer was to move to the door.

The old ranger certainly did present a different appearance.

His beard and rough raiment were gone, and he was clad in a suit that was truly a mixture.

But, let us take a nearer view of him.

Billy and Skinny had made haste down and through the hall, but they entered the bar-room leisurely.

Roger had not yet come in, as they saw at a glance, though that glance was one that could not expose the fact that they were expecting some one.

They stepped to the bar and Billy spoke to the landlord, and even when the door opened they did not turn around. Nor was it necessary, for a glass over the bar shelves reflected the front of the room.

The ranger—ranger no more—paused within the door and looked around.

That was but momentary, and he advanced to the end of the bar and waited for the landlord to attend to him.

Rudder was responding to Billy's simple question or remark, but he was soon done, and turned to see what the new-comer wanted.

"How about lodgin' and board for a day or two?" Roger asked.

"Guess I kin fix ye out," the landlord answered.

"All right; gimme yer quill an' I'll sign ther roll o' honor here."

Billy trembled, for the ex-ranger had not quite managed to disguise his voice and speech.

The pen was handed him, the register pushed out, and in a labored way he proceeded to set down his name.

And now to describe him.

He had, evidently, visited a second-hand store. Of this fact Billy was secretly glad, for it took off the newness from his outfit.

He had on a soft, roll-brim black hat, such as may be found in any city in the land. His coat was a long frock, a little faded. His trowsers were of striped material, and a trifle short, and a pair of half-worn gaiters incased his feet.

Not a man in the room had a suspicion of the trick that was being played upon them.

Even the landlord, who stood right in front of him, did not recognize him.

"There you have it," he said, as he pushed back the book and laid down the pen. "Jackson Jenks, from Keukuk."

Broadway Billy rejoiced to see how well that part of it was acted, but his soul saddened again immediately when he saw the ex-ranger's right hand reach mechanically to grasp the old rifle.

There was nothing there to grasp, and as soon as he realized what he was doing, Roger turned his back upon his pards.

"Shell I show ye up to yer room?" the landlord asked.

"No; it ain't necessary," was the drawl. "I ain't no use fer it till sleep-time."

Saying that, the new-comer sauntered away from the bar and took a survey of the maps, posters, etc., with which the walls were decorated.

The landlord gave attention again to Billy.

"We're going out," Billy said. "If our old pard returns while we are gone, tell him we'll be here by supper-time, if nothing happens."

"All right, I'll mind ter tell him," the landlord responded. "Shell I tell him where ye have gone to, if he asks that?"

Inquisitiveness was a disease with Hodge Rude-

"Well, you might tell him we have gone out to buy new clothes, and such like. You won't know us when we come back, old man."

"Trust me fer that, me laddy," was the boastful rejoinder. "I'd know ye if ye was ter change yer skin."

Billy made some passing answer, and he and Skinny went out.

It was the busines of Roger Watts, now, to play the detective upon the suspected cowboy.

The reason has been set forth in a preceding chapter, and need not be repeated here. That it was a sufficient one need not be urged.

The role of detective, however, was one that was new to Roger Watts, and he felt entirely out of place. He had never been so uncomfortable in his life, he believed.

For some moments after the lads had gone, he stood and pretended deepest interest in the railroad maps on the wall, but that could not be continued indefinitely, so presently he turned, cast a glance at the cowboy, and took a seat.

The suspect, he discovered, was looking at him intently.

Taking up a paper he glanced over it, and pretty soon striking upon the murder case, he became interested, and soon felt at ease.

The cowboy watched him in a covert way, hardly taking his gaze off of him for a moment.

Roger was soon interested in what he was reading, and forgot his duty.

Suddenly, drawn to it, he looked up.

His eyes and those of the suspected man met, and both appeared to be not a littled confused for the second.

The cowboy was the first to recover, and let his gaze wander on around the room, as though it had been but chance, while Roger had to force his attention again to the paper.

At first he had been unable to decide, but now he felt sure, almost, since the new-comer too was interested, that he was being watched because he was suspected of watching them.

Looking up again, he met their eyes once more.

This time it was too much for them. They could stand it no longer.

Getting up, one strode over to where Roger was seated, and demanded in no gentle tone:

"Say, do we owe you anything?"

"Bless ye, no!" was the response, in a good attempt at feigned amazement. "What makes you ask that?"

It was the man with the black whiskers who had made the charge.

"Because you have been staring at me ever since I came in here," he answered. "I can't look up but your eyes are upon me."

Roger was a cool man, whatever he lacked in detective training, and this just put him upon his mettle.

"Seems to me that it must be a rule that works both ways, stranger," he remarked. "If you hadn't been looking at me you wouldn't 'a' seen where I was lookin', that is sart'in."

"No matter; I don't want to be stared at all the time."

"Well, if I was lookin' your way," retorted Roger, "I didn't see you. No matter; I'll fix it so you needn't complain again."

He had been sitting on a bench by the wall. The table at which the men were seated was a few steps distant. Taking a chair, Roger jerked it around so that its back was toward them, and dropping into it, put his feet on the bench.

That change made, he gave his attention again to his paper.

Now Roger Watts had sharp ears, and even while on the bench he could almost overhear some things the two men said.

When they spoke again, in probably the same tone, or lower, their words reached him distinctly.

"I don't know what to think," one said, "but there's a way to prove."

It was he of the black whiskers who spoke, and with his words he made a sign to his companion, immediately adding in louder tone:

"Come, let's take a walk and stretch our legs. We'll be back before your pards get ready to go."

"All right," assented the cowboy, and they rose and went from the room.

Roger Watts was now in a dilemma. To be discovered following them would be awkward; but then he had his orders, and like the soldier he had been, knew that orders had to be obeyed. Maybe he could escape discovery.

CHAPTER IX.

ROGER SCORES A FAILURE.

ROGER left the hotel a few moments after the others had gone out.

He saw them walking up the street at a leisurely pace, talking together in evident earnest tones.

Pulling down his hat, as he had heard or read detectives have a way of doing, he proceeded after them, hoping they would not turn around and discover him.

He knew if they did turn, discovery must follow. Here were no trees, bushes or bowlders such as he had been accustomed to. He was out of his natural element, as it were.

There was but one thing for him to do, and that was to do the best he could.

Meanwhile, the conversation of the men ahead, could he have heard it, might have opened his eyes.

"Who do you take the feller to be?" the cowboy was asking.

"I give that up; I can't tell who he is," was the response. "One of the accursed detectives, though, you may be sure of that."

"And if so, then they are on the right track at last, eh?"

"It would appear so; and yet I don't see how it can be so. But, is the fellow following us?"

"It won't do to turn 'round to see."

"I can fix it."

Taking a small circular looking-glass from his pocket, the man of the black whiskers held it up so that it reflected the street behind them.

"There he comes, sure enough," he announced. "I can't make myself believe that he is a detective. Why, there is no caution about his way of shadowing us at all."

"We must prove it."

"By giving him a long walk, eh?"

"Yes; we will take the most winding course we can, and if he still persists we shall know his game."

"I agree with you. We need not let him suspect that he is noticed, however. Let him have it all his own way, and we'll have our inning presently."

"All right. But what about our gettin' out of the city? Isn't the way open yet?"

"We made the grand mistake in not going at once, I am afraid; though I do not see how on earth any suspicion can be turned against us."

"Nor I; but if this is a detective, and he is following us, what is it for? They have certainly found no clew, or it would have been in the papers. We know there was no clew left."

"Perhaps you have been up to some other dev'ility," he of the black whiskers hinted.

"I don't know of anything that would put the police after me."

"Well, we'll see. He is still following us; let's turn this corner. We'll give him a nice walk, anyhow."

"What about what I was telling you?" the supposed cowboy asked.

"About the lads?"

"Yes."

"You seem to have more dread of them than you have of the police."

"You remember what the papers had to say about them, don't you? They are sharper than rats."

"How did you get onto them?"

"They gave their names away in the bar-room."

"And you think because they took the paper to their room with them, and that was a clever trick on your part, by the way; you think, because they were interested in the Cottrell Case, that they will take a hand in it, eh?"

"I feel 'most certain they will."

"All right, let them; how are they going to come any nearer the truth than the police and other detectives?"

"I don't know; but somehow when I caught that lad's eyes he seemed to look clear through me. I never saw such a pair of eyes in my life. I don't wonder he got Pete on the hip like he did."

"Then if he were to confront you, with an accusing look, I suppose you would give up and make a mess of it all."

"No; blast him!"

"And what do you want to do?"

"I'd like to put them under, to avenge Pete."

"And you want me to lend you a hand at that dirty work?"

"I haven't been doing any dirty work for you, I suppose?"

"Well, let us see to this fellow first, and we'll talk about the lads later on."

"All right. What will you do with him if you find he is following us?"

"I think it must be you alone he's after. If he keeps it up, what do you say to parting company? Then he will follow one or the other of us, and that will give us proof."

"That's a good idea. Is he after us yet?"

The black whiskered man used his glass again.

"Yes; there he comes," he answered.

"All right, let him come; and what do you say to this idea?"

"Well, what is it?"

"Whichever one he follows, let the other follow him."

"I intended that."

"And the other lead him to the Cherry Creek den."

"Ha! now you are coming at it. There we can hold him prisoner, if we find anything against him."

"Yes; or worse."

During their conversation, of which we have quoted only a tithe, they had turned several corners.

The man of the black whiskers made use of his glass again, and discovered the mysterious stranger still after them.

At the next corner they stopped, shook hands and parted.

This was in plain sight of the unsuspecting ranger—rather ex-ranger.

The seeming cowboy turned up the street in one direction, while the man of the whiskers went the opposite way.

When Roger came to the corner he glanced the way the cowboy had gone, and set off after him, but looked around the other way to see what had become of the other.

The man of the black whiskers was still walking away, but by the aid of his glass was noting every action of the suspected man, and when Roger had set forth on the track of the cowboy, stopped and turned back.

"Ha! it was Jake Towser he was after, after all," he muttered to himself. "He is wanted for

something that he is keeping from me. But that detective—Pah! I could do better than that myself. But I'd better take care, he may look back at any moment."

With that, however, came another thought.

It was not necessary to follow; Jake would lead the man to the place named. It would be better for him to get there first and prepare for his reception.

At the first corner he came to he turned, and was immediately hastening off in another direction.

Roger Watts found it easy enough to follow the cowboy.

The fellow lolled along lazily, never looked back—though he had done so once unseen, and appeared to be heading for nowhere in particular.

"Darn ther feller!" Roger at last growled. "Why don't he go some's or do somethin'? This is purty dry sort o' detective work, I should say. I don't believe it is necessary ter foller him at all, but orders is orders, an' Billy is no fool, even if he has got a boyish face."

He was thoughtful.

"No; I don't believe ther feller had any idee against Billy," he presently muttered again. "Billy is so used ter playin' detective, that he thinks every bush is a bear. It ain't really none o' my biz, howsumdever. I have got my orders, and ther rank and file must 'bey orders no matter what it is. I'll run this coyote to his hole, no matter what comes of it."

With that resolve firmly in mind, Roger went on.

Jake Towser, as we have heard him spoken of, seemed determined to lead the spy a weary way.

He went this way and that, turning corner after corner, until Roger Watts began to get out of patience with him.

Finally, however, the fellow held to one direction, and made his pace somewhat slower, and the ranger was nearer to him almost before he was aware of it.

They were in a not very savory quarter of the town now.

Suddenly the cowboy turned into an alley, and was lost to sight in an instant from Roger's place.

"Smoke o' Gittysburg!" Roger ejaculated, "is he goin' ter shake me off like that? This must be ther critter's den, I reckon."

He ran forward and looked down the alley.

The cowboy was just disappearing at the other end of it.

Swiftly but silently Roger followed, and peered around the rear corner with caution.

That was the last he knew for some time.

As he leaned forward, he was given a stunning blow from behind with a piece of lead pipe.

He fell forward to the ground, but was speedily picked up and carried into the building, and to a room on the second floor.

It was in this room that he found himself when he came to his senses.

He stared about him in a bewildered way, wondering where he could be, but could not decide until his eyes presently fell upon two men who were present.

These two were the cowboy and the man of the black whiskers, and they were smoking together and taking things easy.

"Hello!" commented the man with the whiskers, "coming around, are you?"

"Where am I, anyhow?" the ranger demanded.

"Where you are likely to stay for some time," the cowboy made response. "We will show you what it costs to follow two gentlemen like us."

"An' who folleredy ye?" Roger demanded.

"Why, you did!" accused the man with the whiskers.

"That's whar yer is mistaken," Roger denied.

"What makes yer think I did?"

Both the fellows laughed.

"That story is too thin," declared the whiskered man. "No chance could have led you after us the way we came."

"Great Scott!" suddenly exclaimed the cowboy.

"What is it?" asked his companion, glancing at him, so forceful had been the exclamation.

"Why, kill me for a loon if this isn't the very man that came to town with Broadway Billy! I was blind not to see it before!"

"What! You don't mean it!"

"It is a sure thing!"

Roger could only stare, helpless.

Just returning to consciousness, he had dropped into his natural way of speaking, and so had given the fellow every chance to unmask him.

CHAPTER X.

BILLY AND SKINNY READY FOR BUSINESS.
"WHAT have you to say to that?" demanded the whiskered man.

Roger had had just time sufficient to see what he had done, and to gather up his scattered ideas.

"If I knew what you was talking about, I might know what you mean," he made response. "What are ye trying to get at, anyhow?"

"I'll tell you what we are trying to get at," retorted the cowboy. "You are a spy, and the partner of Broadway Billy and his pal, that's what we are coming at I know ye now."

"You know me better'n I know myself, then," averred Roger.

"Do you mean to say you ain't?"

"I'm Jackson Jenks, and I ain't nobody else."

"I don't care what you call yerself; ye can't fool me any longer. What was ye doggin' us for?"

"You are a blasted idiot!" cried Roger, in some anger—anger at finding that he was bound hand and foot, no doubt.

"Not half the idiot you were, to think you could play the detective on me."

"We want to know why you followed us," urged the whiskered man.

"It don't make much difference why he did it, now," said the cowboy. "This is the old fellow I told you about, and it proves all that I suspected. That devil of a New York rat is after us."

"But why should he be?" insisted the other. "Come, tell me why this man should follow you? It was you he was following; not me."

Roger looked at the man in surprise, as if wondering how he knew that.

"I don't know," was the answer Jake Towser made, "but I do know this much: I have got hold of one of the fellows that made it hot for my brother Pete, and I'm going to make it hotter for him."

Here was information, and Roger took it in eagerly. This carried out the suspicion Billy had had.

"I suppose by examining him we might prove whether you are right or not," suggested Whiskers.

"That's so; never thought of that."

"Still, you wouldn't find anything you'd recognize."

"I'll see what is to be found, anyhow," cried the cowboy, and he proceeded to carry out his intention.

Roger struggled, but in vain, for he was well secured, and the fellow searched his pockets thoroughly.

As his confederate had said, though, he found nothing he could recognize, or that proved the man's identity. There was a considerable sum of money, some tobacco, a knife and other trifles; but that was all, except a formidable revolver.

"I'm in this much money, anyhow," laughed Towser, stuffing the ranger's money into his own pocket. "I've made that much out of it."

"And ye would make somethin' else, too, if I could only git loose," growled Roger, fiercely.

"Little fear of your getting loose," rejoined Towser. "You are bound up for keeps. I guess you won't get free any more, for I think Cherry Creek is hungry for you."

"Well, what are you going to do with him?" asked Whiskers.

"I'll tell you," was the response. "We'll keep him, and use him to decoy the others into the same trap. Then I'll make my revenge complete, and we'll be safe against that sharp fellow's meddling with other things."

"Well, I'm willing to have it so, but I am sure there is no danger in that direction. Where the police and others have failed to get a clew, how do you suppose these raw recruits could get one? That idea is altogether out of sense. There was some other reason for his following you."

Roger's mind flew at once to the conclusion that they were talking about the matter of which he had read in the paper. He almost trembled at the suspicion. If he could only get free and tell Billy!

"You seem to forget the great puff the papers gave this Broadway Billy, after the affair at Manitou, don't you?" was the response Towser made. "According to that, he is the devil at detective business. Clews appear to fall right in his way, and when he gets one he knows how to handle it, too."

"Oh, that was all puff. Why, he's nothing more than a boy in years, and it's altogether out of reason."

"Pinon Pete didn't find it so, anyhow. He was too much of a man for Pete and his pals."

"Luck helped him."

"That be darn. If it did, though, it will have to help him more this time, for I have made up my mind that the cuss shall never leave Denver alive."

"If you carry out that idea you will be making sure of him, anyhow. Now, it is time for us to see about what next is on the programme."

"I'm goin' back to Hodge's and lay for the fellows, that's what I'm going to do. They commenced the circus, and now they must see it through. Where shall we meet for another talk?"

"Can't you come back here to-night?"

"Yes; and them fellows with me, maybe."

"All right, come. If you can lure them here I'll help you with the job of getting them out of the way. But, come anyhow."

There was considerable more talk between them, much of which was of interest to Roger Watts, and then they left the room, locking the door, and were gone.

"Smoke o' Gittysburg!" the old man exclaimed, "but I'm in a pickle now for sure. I was a blamed fool to undertake a thing I didn't know anything about; but then who would 'a' s'posed it would come to this? An' there's them two boys, in danger of their lives, and I can't help 'em a bit. Roger Watts, you old fool! you ought to be kicked to death by a mule, you had!"

He struggled hard to get free, but that was useless.

He only worked himself into a sweat, and made his wrists almost raw.

Tiring of that, he began calling for help, pounding his heels upon the floor with great force.

He had not kept this up long when heavy steps sounded without, the door was thrown open, and into the room came the man with the whiskers and a burly ruffian with him.

"What are you doing here, making such an infernal racket?" the whiskers demanded. "We'll fix you so you won't do any more of that."

The big fellow had already laid hold upon him, and he was speedily gagged and bound tighter than ever.

If he had been in a bad fix before, he was in a worse now, and realized it.

He was picked up and thrown upon a bed the room contained, and there he was left to his pleasant reflections.

And there for the present we must leave him, while we follow Broadway Billy and his lieutenant.

It being their intention first of all to go to the post-office, they made inquiries of the first policeman they met where to find it and how to get there.

Being told that it was on Champa street, between Seventeenth and Eighteenth, and being further directed the nearest and best way to reach that quarter, they thanked the officer and went on.

The direction they had received presently brought them to one of the cable roads, and taking a car they settled down to enjoy the ride while they took in the sights of that magic city of the Rockies.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy had to ejaculate as they went along, "this is no slouch of a town, Skinny."

Skinny did not notice him.

Billy was not long in guessing the reason.

"Ahem!" he prefaced. "James, I remarked that this city of Denver is rather a pretty, elegant place."

"I agree with you, William," was the response.

"Oh, don't mind putting on any flourishes when you speak to me," Billy cried. "Plain Billy is good enough for me. Don't call me anything else."

"I thought I'd let you see how much more manly it sounds."

"So as to impress the same idea of James, eh?"

This was in low tones and just between themselves, and their tongues went at a lively rate till they came to the place where they must get out.

A short walk then brought them to the post-office.

Their inquiry for letters led to some questions concerning their identity, and it was some minutes before they got their mail.

Billy had ordered the holding of their mail, upon setting out from Santa Fe, in order that delay would not cause it to be returned as undelivered.

Broadway Billy soon impressed it upon the clerk at the window that he was the right party, and when that was accomplished four or five letters were handed out to them.

They read the letters then and there, learned that their mothers were well, and responded by postals at once, promising letters to follow immediately.

"Now for business," said Billy firmly, when that was off their minds and hands.

"Now for different clothes, you mean," Skinny corrected. "I'm tired of going about in this wild West fashion."

"So am I, too, little one—but not very little," answered Billy. "These were just the thing when we were out in the woolly, but there isn't anything wild about Denver. New clothes, out and out, and then a peep at this great mystery. Hope you haven't forgot that."

"No; I haven't forgotten it; but what about that trunk?"

"Oh, that will keep a day or so longer, I guess. Plenty of time to see about that. Here, this street seems to be one of the great centers of the town."

Billy was right, for they were upon Seventeenth.

Presently they sighted a large clothing and furnishing store, and entered.

When they came out again they were hardly recognizable. Clad in neat business suits, with hats and shoes in keeping, the change was great.

And a handsome pair of young men they were, too. Billy was a little the taller, but Skinny had now grown to be the larger otherwise. He was growing decidedly fat, and the change became him well.

"What now, Billy?" Skinny now asked.

"A barber is the next thing in order, James," Billy answered.

"Hello!" cried Skinny, "you did get it out that time, didn't you! How did you do it?"

"Oh, it's no trouble now," assured Billy. "You look every inch a man, Skin—I mean James—and that's the fact."

Their hair had grown decidedly long, so a barber was next sought out, and after he had done with them they had laid aside the last vestige that marked their sojourn on the plains.

By this time evening was drawing on, and they bent their steps in the direction of the hotel, where they had left their friend Roger. They little imagined what had happened to him in their absence.

Taking the shortest route they knew, they were not long in reaching their destination.

CHAPTER XI.

PUZZLED.

"WONDER if we'll find Mr. Jackson Jenks on hand?" queried Billy, as they drew near the hotel.

"S'pose so, unless that cowboy fellow has led him off on a wild-goose chase," was Skinny's response.

"Well, we'll soon know, for here we are."

"Reckon he'll stare at us, sure."

They went in, but a glance around showed them that neither the cowboy nor the old ranger was there.

Stepping up to the bar, where the proprietor had squared himself for business upon their entering, they gave him a chance to recognize them.

"Bless my eyes!" Ruddle exclaimed. "Kin it be possible that you is the same fellers?"

"I guess it is, old man," answered Billy. "But, say, has that old pard of ours got back yet?"

"Haven't seen hide nor ha'r of him," the landlord answered.

"Sweet pertaters! is that so?"

"True as preachin'."

"What do you think of it, Skin—James?"

"Don't know what to think," was the lieutenant's response.

"By ther way," spoke up the landlord, "heur's a note fer you, me son, and that may explain it."

"A note for me?" cried Billy.

"Yes."

Billy took the envelope and quickly tore it open.

Drawing forth the half sheet it contained, this was what he read:

"BILLY:

"I have met with an accident. My leg is broke. When y' n get this con'e to me at once and have me tak n to the hotel. The boy wil wait and fetch you to the right place. I get a man to write this for me."

"Your old pard."

"ROGER WATTS,"

Billy looked around at once for the boy.

A lad of fifteen or so was seated in one corner of the room.

"Is that the fellow who brought this?" Billy inquired.

"He's the chap," the landlord answered.

"What does it say?" asked Skinny.

Billy handed him the note to let him read for himself.

As soon as Skinny had mastered the contents, he and Billy exchanged a glance.

"Anything ther matter?" inquired the landlord.

"Yes; our old pard has met with an accident," answered Billy. "He has got a broken leg."

"Sho! you don't tell me! That's too bad, that is, darn me if it ain't. And where is he? Is he bein' cared fer?"

"Can't tell where he is," rejoined Billy, "but this lad is to take us to him. And that puts us out, too, for we can't go just now, anyhow. This is bad luck."

Billy did not believe the message at all.

His suspicion was aroused, and he wanted to think out a plan of operation.

Was the landlord to be trusted? He and Skinny had previously agreed that he was an honest man.

"Well, send somebody else," the landlord suggested.

"See here," spoke Billy, in lower tones. "Can we trust you, Mr. Ruddle?"

"I take pride in sayin' that ye kin," was the prompt response. "What is the sittywashun, my son?"

"What has become of that man who came in here just before we went out and registered as Jackson Jenks?"

The landlord eyed the questioner keenly.

"I begin ter see somethin'," he mused. "Why, he went out, arter awhile, and hasn't come back yet."

"Went out, eh? Who went with him? Did he meet some old pard and go off in company with him? I see you have guessed who Jackson Jenks was."

"May I be darn!" the landlord ejaculated. "I wouldn't a' believed it, and that's preachin' true. No; he didn't go out with nobody; he went off alone. He had some words with some fellers here."

"Hal who were they?"

"You remember that cowboy who spoke to you when you kem heur?"

"Yes."

"Well, one was him, and the other was a man in black whiskers who had come in and was talkin' to the cowboy."

"What was their quarrel about?"

"Why, the cowboy and his pard 'cused the old man of starin' at 'em."

Billy smiled.

He understood about how it had been.

"Where is the cowboy now?" he inquired.

"Oh, he went off with the whiskered man."

"Was that after the old man had gone out?"

"No; it was before. I noticed that Mr. Jenks went out soon after them."

"And hasn't been back?"

"No."

"Have the others been back?"

"The cowboy has, and 'peared to be waitin' fer somebody, but he went out a spell ago."

"How long a spell ago?"

"An hour, I should reckon."

"Before this lad came with the note?"

"Yes; ther lad ain't been heur very long."

"All right, that settles it. You said you were to be trusted; don't mention what I have been asking you."

"Yer don't think anything is wrong, do ye?" Ruddle asked.

"There was a good deal wrong when we left the old man here alone," was the response.

"Do yer know," and the landlord became yet more confidential, "that I have a spicion that way meself?"

"What do you mean?" Billy demanded.

"You remember that newspaper I gev ye at ther table, don't ye?"

"Perfectly well."

"Waal, that cowboy feller put me up ter do it. He said if you got onto that murder case you'd never let go of ther paper till you had ended it; an' sure enough ye did take it up with ye."

"And he asked you if I did that?"

"Yes; we'd bet a drink on it."

"Sweet pertaters an' tin horns!" cried Billy. And then he gave a long whistle.

"What do ye think on't?" Ruddle asked.

"I think if our old pard has got a broken leg we'll have to see to him, and taht in a hurry," answered Billy.

"Then you are goin' fer him?"

"Sure; and we'll bring him here, if you don't object—and you can't."

"Sartain not," agreed the landlord. "Bring him right heur, and we'll see him through."

"All right, keep the boy here till we go up to the room a minute."

"He'll stay."

Billy and Skinny went out and up to their room.

As soon as the door had closed Billy took off his hat and whirled it around his head.

"Sweet pertaters!" he cried, in low tones, "but this jest sets the pot to b'ilin', Skinny, and that's a sure thing. Roger is in ther hands of they enemy, and we have got ter get him out, don't ye see?"

"And this note is a decoy to get us in the same fix, sure."

"You are bright as a dollar, Skinny—I mean James, but haven't time to stop now to correct myself. Take the will for the deed. Yes; that's it; and instead of our falling into the trap, we must improve the chance to find out where Roger is corraled."

"But how is it going to be done?"

"Send a note back by the boy, and follow him."

"But, don't it strike you that somebody will be on the watch?"

"That's so. Sweet pertaters! if we only had that trunk and our disguises, eh, pard?"

"But we haven't, and Roger has got to be rescued. If it's a broken leg fer a fact, all right; if it ain't, it's somethin' worse."

"I agree with ye, my fat philosopher, every time. Now, see here: it is going to be night before long, so suppose we keep this boy till dark, give him his supper, and then go with him."

"Jest what you think best, fer Roger must be rescued."

"And it strikes me hard that this thing is going to lead up to the murder mystery, too," Billy said, thoughtfully.

"What makes ye think that?"

"Why, ther fact that that very fellow made the first move to bring it to our notice. He knew who we were, and had no need to try to prove us by that. He's got a finger in that pie, pard, if not indeed his whole hand."

"It looks so."

"And if that is the case, this is going to be a life or death racket."

"You bet."

"But we're in it jest the same—sweet pertaters, yes! They have laid hands on our pard, and if we don't make the fur and feathers fly, it will be because we can't, that's all. Look to yer poppers, and make sure they are in prime order. We may want 'em, and if we do, we'll want 'em bad."

Both looked to their revolvers.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy suddenly exclaimed.

"What now?" demanded Skinny.

"Here's another way ter look at it. Seems ter me I am losin' my head, and the sooner I get back to Gotham, the better. We want to get that boy up here and pump him, that's what we want to do."

"Hold on," objected Skinny, "that will give it away that we suspect something underhanded."

"Right," Billy agreed. "I tell you I'm no good at all any more, Skinny. I lay it all to your change of name, too. That has knocked me off my balance."

"Get out! You better say this is the toughest tangle you have tackled for a long time, that's what's the matter. Come, stir yourself up, and think of some plan of action."

"Mebby you're right, Skinny; I dunno. If I had somethin' in my head besides mush, mebby I could think. Ha! here's a skeem that will knock 'em silly, or I'm no jedge of molasses. We'll send a wagon to bring the ranger home. That will sort o' upset their plans."

"And what'll we do?"

"Follow the wagon. See, it is gettin' dark now."

That plan agreed upon, and details arranged, the lads went below.

CHAPTER XII.

VENTURED AND GAINED.

BILLY explained his idea to the landlord in the manner best suited to the case. He wanted a conveyance, he said, with a man to drive, in which to bring their wounded partner home. That would save time.

As this was made known, Billy noticed that the boy in the corner appeared ill at ease. The plan evidently did not suit him. Billy saw a new opening. He made use of it, too.

"That suits you, don't it, sonny?" he asked.

"Are you the man what the note was for?" the boy asked nervously.

"Yes; guess I am. You see, you can ride

back, and they can put the hurt man in a wagon and bring him right here. That will save us the trouble of going."

"But I was told to be sure and bring you with me."

"Who told you that?"

"The man what sent the note."

"All right, we'll go along, then," agreed Billy, with another change to suit the circumstances of the case.

"But they didn't say nothin' about no wagon," the boy persisted.

He had evidently been drilled upon the importance of bringing Billy and his pard back with him, and could not invent excuses to cover his confusion.

"I know," said Billy, "they have left that for us to do. We couldn't expect them to furnish a wagon at their own expense. We'll be ready in a few minutes and then we'll be off."

The landlord had sent to the stables for such a rig as they needed.

Presently it came around to the front, and was announced as ready, and Billy and Skinny went out to it.

The young messenger had gone out just a step ahead of them, and when Billy set foot outside he saw the boy making off up the street as fast as he could run.

Into the wagon Billy sprung, Skinny following, and the driver was ordered to keep the boy in sight, even if he had to make the wheels spin to do it, or had to dump half a dozen cable cars.

The wagon was a light spring affair, with one seat in front, and the two young detectives stood up behind the driver, holding fast to the back of the seat.

The chase was not a long one.

At a corner not far away the boy was seen to stop.

Immediately a man joined him, and in the glare of an electric light Billy recognized the cowboy.

"Turn to the left, quick!"

"Left it is."

So Billy ordered, and so the driver responded, and in the same moment the wagon went spinning into another street.

No sooner out of sight from the place where the boy had stopped than Billy called a halt, and he and Skinny got out.

"That settles it for this round," Billy explained. "You ride on a little distance, and then go back by some other way. We have sighted our game.

"All right, sir; reckon you know what you are about, but it is a puzzler to me."

The driver went on, and Billy and "pard" crossing the street, went back to the corner.

Fortunately there was a friendly shadow there, and they could watch without being observed.

The lad and the cowboy were still talking, but their business was about at an end now, as soon appeared.

The boy made a jump to get out of reach of a kick that was sent in his direction, and ran off, while the cowboy walked away up the street.

"Now for it," said Billy to Skinny. "He hasn't seen us since we slicked up, and he'll never know us unless we come face to face in the light, and we'll try not to let that happen."

"This is the best that could have happened," remarked Skinny.

"You're right it is," Billy assented. "We're on the trail now, for sure."

"And their little plot is made as plain as day."

"Yes; we were to go with the boy, to some den or other, I suppose, and this fellow was to follow us and see that we were taken care of. It was a pretty nice scheme, but it has bu'sted."

"And there'll be a surprise for him, too," declared Skinny, "if we once get our grip on him. There is no doubt now, not a bit, that he has some reason for wanting us out of the way."

They followed as closely as they dared, and no great precaution was needed, for they were practically disguised.

The man Towser had not seen them since their great change in appearance, and would not be likely to recognize them at sight, even if he did.

But he evidently had no suspicion that he could be followed, for he kept straight ahead, and finally reached the place where the old ranger was imprisoned, and entered.

"This is the den where Rover is, and I'll bet on it," declared Billy, as he and Skinny stopped opposite.

The first floor of the building was occupied as a saloon.

"And I'll chuck my bet right in with yours," agreed Skinny. "How are we going to get him out?"

"Do you think we dare go into the den boldly?"

"We dare do it, but what would it amount to? We're dressed too fine for the place, to judge by what we see."

The door was open, and a view of the interior revealed roughs and toughs of about the worst type the city could boast, evidently.

"Well, something has got to be done, and that right off, too," declared Billy, in earnest tone. "We are losing time here, and the Cottrell Case is suffering for us, you know."

"You wouldn't tackle that to-night, anyhow?"

"Wouldn't I? I'd take a bird's-eye view of it, I rather think."

"Well, it has got to be a bold move or none, that's sure."

"You say it right. We can't call on the police to turn the ranch inside out, so come along with me."

Billy set forth to cross the street, and when he reached the opposite side stepped boldly to the hall door of the house.

This was closed, but there was a light within, and if not seen, the noise in the saloon would cover all chance of their being overheard.

The door opened at Billy's touch, and the two entered.

To their surprise a woman stood ready there to meet them.

"Good-evening, gentlemen," she greeted.

"Good-evening," Billy responded. "Seems we have made a mistake."

"Perhaps not; what place do you take this to be? Maybe you are all right. Who directed you here?"

At that moment a voice from somewhere above gave Billy the cue.

"Make your play, gentlemen," were the words he heard.

Immediately followed the closing of a door, and steps were heard in the hall approaching the stairs.

"To tell the truth," said Billy, "we were looking for a game, but this has no appearance of anything of that sort, so we'll back out."

The opening of the door above, at the right moment, had, as said, given him the idea to act upon.

As he finished, a man was descending the stairs.

The woman made no response till he had reached the bottom and gone out, and in the few brief moments Billy and Skinny heard the laughter of other women further above.

Billy made up his mind that he had gotten into a bad nest of vipers, but his game was there, and having penetrated so far he must see it through.

"No need to back out, if that is what you wanted to find," was the woman's smiling remark in response to Billy's observation. "This is no doubt the place you are looking for."

"Up-stairs?" Billy queried.

"Yes; right along there, first door to the right."

Billy went up boldly without further words, and just as he reached the top a welcome sight greeted him.

Further along the hall, with his back toward him and Skinny, was the man whom they had followed.

Had they been a second later, they would have missed him, for he disappeared immediately into a rear room.

"We have holed him, pard, sure!"

So Billy exclaimed, in whisper.

"Right you are!"

Billy pressed on down the hall, regardless of the gambling room.

There were several doors, about equal distance apart, in that end of the building.

The one into which the seeming cowboy had disappeared was the one next to the last, and at that Billy stopped.

He applied his ear to the door and heard voices within, but it was no place to play the spy, for the hall was lighted from end to end.

Nor could he enter the room, for that would spoil everything, and perhaps precipitate a fight at once; for it was open war now between him and this unknown personage.

Touching Skinny on the arm, Billy stepped quickly to the next door.

This one he tried, but it was locked. They were taking desperate chances all around, however.

Billy thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out the key to their room at the hotel, and thrust it into the lock to try it.

To his surprise it turned, and the door opened.

But, even as it did so the thought came to him —What if discovered and taken for a thief?"

There was no time to stop to debate the matter then. To remain in the hall meant to draw attention, so into the room they stepped, closing the door after them silently.

There being a transom over the door, the room was rendered light enough to reveal everything it contained.

Both the young but daring detectives cast quick glances around, and together made the discovery that there was a man on the bed.

"Seems to be asleep," whispered Billy. "We must make no noise to waken him, and if we can't hear what's going on in the other room we'll get out again."

"Yes; but he's bound!" exclaimed Skinny.

Billy went a step nearer.

"Sweet pertaters!" he explained, "it's Rover!"

And Roger Watts it was, sound asleep, even though bound and gagged.

Billy sprung to the bed, gave him a shaking, and when the old man opened his eyes he gave a start of surprise.

"Don't make a sound," Billy cautioned.

"We're in a hot hole, Roger, and may have to fight to get out. Not a word, now, and I'll free you."

CHAPTER XIII.

GOOD LUCK AND MUCH PLUCK.

It had been a welcome surprise to the two lads.

Skinny took his station at the door, revolvers in hand.

Billy speedily set the old ranger at liberty, and helped him to get up.

"Not a word," Billy cautioned again. "We are in the grip of Old Nick in this hole."

"Right you be," echoed Roger, in whisper. "And there may be somethin' of a ruction before we get out."

"How came you here?" asked Billy.

"I was led right inter a trap, that's how," Roger answered.

In as few words as possible he told what had happened, and then wanted to know how his pards had discovered him.

Billy explained that as briefly, following it up immediately with other questions as to whether the old ranger had been able to learn anything.

"Smoke o' Gittysburg," Roger exclaimed in whisper, "I should say I did 'farn somethin'! This heur cowboy feller is a brother to that 'ar Pinon Pete what we trapped at Manitou."

"Sweet pertaters! I was sure I wasn't mistaken in him. I told him at once by the cut of his phiz."

"An' that ain't all, neither," the ranger declared.

"What more?"

"Why, if these heur fellers ain't got a hand in that 'ar Cottrell mystery, then I'm a gosling, that's all."

"The Cottrell Case!" cried Billy. "How did you learn about that?"

Their talk was animated, but in the lowest and most cautious of whispers.

"Why, I read about it in a paper at the hotel," the ranger explained. And from that he related all he had overheard.

"Sweet pertaters!" cried Billy, "there's meat in this pie, sure's ye live! If we don't yank the rag off the bush this time you can kick me hard!"

All this had occupied but a few minutes.

Billy now gave attention to business, cautioning the others to remain quiet.

He wanted, if possible to find some means of hearing what was being said in the adjoining room.

Voices could be heard there, but no words could be made out, at first, though he pressed his ear tight to the wall to catch them.

The walls were papered, and presently Skinny drew Billy's attention to a spot higher up that was stained. It was a circle darker than the rest of the surface.

"A pipe-hole!" cried Billy.

It took but a moment for him to mount a chair and apply his ear there.

Here, to his satisfaction, some words were made plain, but he was not satisfied yet.

Wetting his finger, he drew a circle around the discolored paper several times, and then with his knife noiselessly cut it out.

A hole was presented, covered at the opposite end by the wallpaper of the other room. It was a hole about six inches across, lined with piping, intended as a connection for a pipe to a chimney further on.

Not satisfied yet, Billy wet the second paper as he had the first, but in this case only on one spot near the bottom, and with his knife silently

punctured a hole in it large enough to look through, though he soon found that it did not give him a very extended view.

The five inches of thickness of the wall hindered him from seeing well into the other room, and he could discern only one person.

This was a man with a heavy black beard, and Billy immediately guessed that it was the one whom Roger had mentioned.

He heard but one other voice, and knew, of course, it was that of his enemy, the pretending cowboy.

"Yes; it has got to be done," he of the black whiskers was saying. "That infernal detective, Brandland, has struck the right trail, and it is now or never."

"But, where shall we cut to?" asked the cowboy.

"As far as possible, but not both to the same place. You had better strike for California or Texas. I'm going straight to New York."

"We'll see about that," thought Billy. "Even if you are innocent of the murder, you have been up to some sort of mischief, and I'm going to snap you."

Skinny and the ranger, standing close to Billy, could hear what was said, now that the hole was open.

"And when will we start?" asked the cowboy.

"By the very first trains that pull out from the Union Depot."

"But, you have said the police and detectives are watching the depot like so many hawks."

"And so they are; but they are about useless, for they can't stop everybody and hold them all for trial, and our chances are as good as the rest."

"You have changed your mind, then."

"Yes; for I have been up to the depot, and could have passed as well as not. The only thing to guard against is buying the ticket."

"How's that?"

"I noticed that Chief Farley's men paid mighty close attention to all who bought long-distance tickets."

"I ketch on. We want to buy short-distance ones."

"Yes; and return tickets at that."

"Better still."

"Once let us get out of Denver, and Brandland can whistle for us, and the police too."

"You bet! What about our prisoner?"

"That thing came to a bad mess, didn't it? May as well leave him right where he is. He'll be discovered in the morning."

"I'd rather slit his neck for him."

"That won't do. We have got enough trouble on our hands. Once let it be discovered that we cribbed Cottrell's safe, and nothing would save our necks from the gallows."

Broadway Billy's ears were wide open now.

Here was a confession! But, what mystery was back of it yet?

Was it possible that these men had committed the robbery, and yet were innocent of the worse crime?

"It's a puzzler to me who done that nasty work," declared the cowboy. "What call had the gal to come there? and who was it that shot her when she did come?"

"Questions that we can't answer, and all the more reason why we want to keep out of the hands of the police."

"You bet! Well, what time does the train go?"

"We have two good hours yet, and may as well put in one of them right here, I suppose. We don't want to be at the station too early, and don't want to rush in too late. See?"

"I guess your head is level. S'pose we have a bottle of wine and a pack of cards to help pass the time."

"Not a bad idea."

"I'll go and get them."

The cowboy went out, and Billy got down from the hole.

"Did you catch what was said?" he carefully whispered.

"Some of it," was the reply.

"These are the fellows that robbed the bank, sure as guns!"

"An' what are ye going ter do about it?" asked the ranger. "That cowboy has got my money in his pocket, too."

"We'll make him disgorge," declared Billy. "Wait till he comes back, and we'll go in and scoop them."

"Mebby they'll lock the door though," suggested Skinny.

"Sweet pertaters!" cried Billy, "mebby you're right. Besides, we can make sure work of 'em one at a time. Say, Roger, get on the bed there and groan fer all you are worth."

"What for, lad?"

"That will draw old Black Beard in here, and we'll nab him."

The ranger smiled as he comprehended the young man's meaning, and quickly obeyed.

Billy and Skinny took their place behind the door, and in a moment an angry snarl was heard in the other room, and hasty steps followed.

Billy had not locked the door of the room they were in, but had taken out the key and returned it to his pocket.

The door of the adjoining room was heard to open, and the next moment a hand was laid on the knob of the one the detective trio were in.

It was with an ejaculation of surprise that the man opened it, finding it unlocked, but he strode forward to the bed on which the supposed prisoner lay, and in a low tone demanded:

"What's the matter with you? Stop your infernal noise, or—"

He stopped short, and with a start, for the cold tubes of revolvers were pressing against his head on each side.

"Up with your hands!" hissed Billy, "or off goes your head!"

With an oath the man knocked their arms aside, and sprung back, at the same time reaching for a weapon.

"Stop!" ordered Billy, "or I'll plug you!"

With the command, he sprung forward, caught the man by the throat, and pressed his revolver against his forehead.

The fierce light in Billy's eyes cowed the man more than the weapon, and for an instant he did not resist. It was that instant that settled his fate.

Roger the Rover and Skinny were upon him in the same moment, and before another second passed he was helplessly a prisoner.

The gag was forced into his mouth, and his hands were securely bound.

It had all taken place in a very brief space of time.

"Now for the other," cried Billy. "I'm going in there, and as soon as he enters, Roger, you come in after him. Skinny, give Roger one of your revolvers, and you stay here and guard this fellow."

His directions were brief and hasty, and as soon as they had been uttered, Billy looked out to see whether the cowboy was returning.

Not seeing him, and the hall being for the moment deserted, it took the lad but a second to dodge from one room into the other and close the door.

He was gone too soon, for barely had he disappeared when Jake Towser came up the back steps bearing a bottle and having a pack of cards in hand, and was soon at the door.

The door opened, and he stepped in.

He stopped short in evident surprise at finding his confederate gone, but the same moment brought him a greater surprise.

Broadway Billy's powerful right hand gripped his neck, and the chilling tube of a revolver was pressed behind his ear in a way that was terrible to feel.

"Don't move," Billy cautioned, "or I'll scatter your brains all over the room."

An instant later and Roger Watts sprung in, and the man was made secure.

CHAPTER XIV.

BILLY'S FULL HAND.

"WHAT do you think of this?" Billy asked, as he knelt beside the rascal, with his revolver in hand.

"What do ye mean by it?" the fellow gasped. "What have I done ter you? You let me up, an' then give me half a chance at yer."

"It isn't what you have done so much as what you meant to do," rejoined Billy. "We bagged that brother of yours, Pinon Pete, and now we've done the same for you. And that isn't all either; there's another chapter to it."

Roger was preparing gag and bonds, while Billy held the fellow down, and having them now ready, Mr. Towser was soon as helpless as the other fellow.

Again Billy took a cautious glance into the hall.

The coast was all clear, and motioning to Roger, they quickly transferred the prisoner into the other room.

This, as the three reasoned, was the safer room of the two, since it was the one in which Roger had been held prisoner, and less likely to be visited.

"Now" questioned Roger, greatly excited, "what next? Durn me if it ain't 'most as 'citin' as fightin' b'ar at close range."

"I never had any experience in that line," said Billy, "but if there is as much satisfaction

in downing Bruin as there is in downing such rascals as these, I know how it is."

"But, what next?" Skinny urged.

"Sweet pertaters!" cried Billy. "Give me time to think, will you? I can't grind but one idea through my think-mill at once, you know."

"Take yer time about it," said the ranger, "but as soon as ye come around to it I'd like ter see if this cuss has got my money about him yet."

"Sweet pertaters! That is what I was trying to think of. I knew something was wanting. We'll go through their pockets and see what they have got about them. Maybe there's a clew to be had that will unlock the whole tangle."

With that he gave his attention to the black-whiskered man, leaving Skinny and Roger to deal with the other.

"Sweet pertaters!"

So they soon heard Billy exclaim, and Skinny and the Rover saw that he had the black beard in his hand.

The beard was false, and the man's face now exposed, was clean shaven, and the unshorn villain was glaring at Billy like a tiger. The combination had indeed struck it.

He was trying to say something, but the gag in his mouth prevented his making any intelligible sound, and Billy certainly cared little what he was trying to make known.

There was soon an exclamation also from the ranger, as he recovered his money.

The two fellows were searched thoroughly, and presently the work was done.

Broadway Billy had brought to light some letters and papers.

"Have got to find out what is in these," he declared. "Can't go any further till I get all the information there is to be had. If there's a clew to be picked up, we're the boys that want it."

"But is it light enough here to read them?" asked Skinny.

"If it isn't it is in the other room," answered Billy. "You keep guard and I'll step in there."

"Mind ye don't get diskivered," cautioned the ranger.

"That don't worry me much now, Roger," was the response. "We've got the best hand, and we're going to hold it. Still, it will pay to be careful."

Billy peered out, waited till favorable opportunity offered, and then dodged from one room to the other.

Light was burning in the second room, and closing the door, Billy looked at the letters.

There were three of them, and all were addressed thus:

WINDAM MARKISS,
No. — — STREET,
Denver City."

"That's a good name, anyhow," Billy commented. "And now I'll see what's inside. I hope it opens up big and gives me the grip onto the whole matter."

The first one he opened proved to be only a dun from a tailor.

"Humph!" Billy muttered, "it don't pan very rich at first, anyhow. We'll see what the next one will show up."

This one was more to his liking, and read this way:

"MARK:—

"You will find it ready for you at ten o'clock. Be on hand, and rob safe of everything. Leave all open, and be sure to leave keys. If not found ready, you will know smethin' has gone wrong. This is the last help I can give you. Be sure to leave outer door open slightly. Yours finally, P. H."

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy ejaculated, when he had read; "this is a stunner, and no fooling about it. Who in the mischief is this P. H.?"

The third letter proved to be of no interest.

Putting them into his pocket, Billy dodged back to the other room.

The man who had been denuded of the black whiskers, and whose name appeared to be Markiss, was still making a great fuss as though wanting to talk.

"See here," demanded Billy. "If we'll take off the gag will you talk, but not give the alarm?"

The man nodded vigorously.

"All right; we'll try you," said Billy. "Take off the gag, Rover, and if he sets up a yell it will be his last. I'll settle him for good!"

Billy stood ready, revolver in hand, while the old ranger removed the gag from the man's mouth.

"Now, what is it?" Billy asked.

"You have got the dead wood on me, hard."

"Should rather think we have," declared Billy.

"You have got it all your own way. We can't do anything. If you run us in, though, you'll hang us, but we didn't do that murder, that I'll swear."

"Then who did do it?" Billy questioned.

"Who but you could have done it?"

"I don't know. It was done after we cracked the safe and were gone."

"Wasn't it the person who signs herself P. H.?"

Billy had made out that the letter was in a woman's hand.

The man started.

"I don't know," he assured.

"Well, it looks a good deal that way," Billy averred. "And I guess this is a clew that will lead up to the right party."

"But you won't make anything by handing us over," urged the man. "Let me and my friend go free, and we'll give you a hundred thousand dollars in hand in clean cash. What do you say?"

"That's a big sum," mused Billy, as if tempted.

"Big! Well, I should say so! You'll never get another chance like this in your life."

"Where is the money, though?" asked Billy. "Maybe you are trying to play roots on us. We want something solid about it, or it's no use to talk."

"The money is under this roof," the man declared. "Set us free, and I'll go and get the money and bring it to you. You will never have such a chance again."

"You'll have to bid higher than that, now," retorted Billy, thoughtfully.

"That's about all we got out of the thing."

"You swear that you didn't kill the girl, do you?"

"Yes; and we don't know who did."

"Well, tell me who this P. H. is."

"That I'll never tell you, never."

"That settles it, then," said Billy, resolutely. "We can't come to any bargain, I see. Bind him up again, Rover."

"Hold on!" the fellow pleaded. "We'll give you every cent we got out of the thing. You'll be independent for life. Don't go back on us this way."

Billy made a motion, and the ranger replaced the gag.

"No use wasting breath talking to him," he announced. "We're going to take 'em, now that we've got 'em."

"Can we get them out of this den?" questioned Skinny.

"We will, or take the den with us," Billy avowed, determinedly.

"Hadn't ye better go and get the help of some policemen?" suggested the old ranger.

"You are all the policeman we want, just now," Billy made response to that. "Get them ready, and down and out we go, and goodness help the man that tries to stop us, that's all!"

"I don't like ther looks of it that way," the ranger opposed, meditatively. "Mebby ther will be a fight, and ther odds will be all against us. We might fight out, but we'd lose ther prisoners, and might get into a peck of trouble."

Billy reflected.

"If you feel that way about it," he decided, "maybe I had better go slow up grade. It isn't as though we were in New York, where we know every inch of ground, and we might get dumped. Can you hold the fort while I go for the help?"

"Yes; we kin do that, never fear," Roger promised.

"All right, I'm off, then. Don't let them be taken from you if you have to fight."

"Rest easy on that part of it," assured Skinny. "I will plug the first man that crosses the sill of this room with that intention."

Billy stepped out boldly, and walked straight to the stairs and down.

The woman on guard at the bottom gave him a smile, and opened the door for him.

"I'll be right back in a few minutes," Billy observed.

"Had good luck, I hope," was the response.

"Left-handed luck," answered Billy. "I'm going for more help."

He meant it to be understood that he was going for another supply of money, and so the woman took it.

Once outside he stopped and looked around.

Just across the street, talking together, were two policemen.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy said to himself, "is it possible? On hand when they are wanted!"

Going straight across to them, he said:

"Are you fellows interested any in the Cottrell matter?"

They turned upon him in an instant, full of interest and evidently determined to learn more.

"What do you know about it?" one asked.

"Quite a good sized chunk," was the bold rejoinder. "How would you like the honor of helping me scoop in the fellows who robbed Cottrell's safe?"

"See here, who are you?" the other officer demanded, laying a hand on Billy's shoulder.

"Well, when I'm home in New York," Billy made answer, "I'm known as Broadway Billy. Perhaps you saw my name in the papers a few days ago?"

The officers were fairly in a fever of interest now, and were ready to hear what Billy had to say.

CHAPTER XV.

BILLY WINS RECOGNITION.

NEEDLESS to say, Billy rattled off his story at a lively rate.

The two officers could hardly believe that they heard aright. Could it be possible that the robbers had been captured?

"How do we know that you are what you claim to be?" one questioned, when the young detective had come to the end of his story. "How do we know that you have been telling us the truth?"

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy retorted, "I haven't got my name branded on me anywhere, nor yet a strawberry mark on my off shoulder; but you just come along with me, and if you don't find I've given it to you straight, you may run me in, that's all."

"And that's what we'll do, too."

"All right, I won't kick. Come on."

"But, this is a bad den, young man, and we may have trouble."

"Are you afraid to go?"

"No; but we ought to have some backing,"

"Backing? Sweet pertaters! My pard Roger is as good as two men, and Skinny is equal to one and a half; while I make up the balance of power. If you are afraid and don't want to come, stay, that's all."

They were coming, however, and were right at Billy's heels.

Billy opened the hall door boldly, and at sight of the officers the woman in charge turned pale and reached for a bell-pull.

"Never mind that!" cried Billy, catching her arm, although he did not know just what she intended doing, but guessed that it was to alarm those above. "Don't you make any fuss, and there won't be any harm done."

"Are you going to pull us?" the woman inquired.

"No; we are only after two fellows," Billy explained. "You keep right still, and there won't half a dozen know we have been here."

"That's so, Moll," one of the officers confirmed. "We don't mean to make a fuss."

"You remain here and see that she does keep quiet," directed Billy, in a tone of authority.

Broadway Billy was clearly born to command, for the officer stopped there as obediently as though the order had been from the chief of police.

With the other officer at his heels, Billy sprung up the stairs, waiting now to get his prisoners out of the place as quickly as possible.

At the head of the stairs he met two men, who had just come out of the gaming-room.

"Hello!" cried one, "what's up now?"

"Nothing very exciting," answered Billy, and nothing worth wasting any time over."

The men were curious to learn more, however, so stopped and turned back to see what was going to be done.

Billy led the way direct to the room where his pards and the prisoners were, and opened it, to be met with a pointed revolver in the hands of Skinny.

"I see you are right on deck, pard," Billy greeted. "Come, now, and we'll get out of here in a jiffy or two."

The old ranger and the policemen brought the prisoners to their feet, and they were marched out into the hall.

Immediately exclamations were heard from the two men who had stopped out of curiosity to learn who was going to be arrested.

"Why, it's Mark Windam!" they cried.

"The dickens!" exclaimed the policeman. "He's the proprietor of this place, young fellow."

"I don't care what he's the proprietor of," responded Billy, forcibly. "He is my prisoner, and out of here he goes!"

Billy scented trouble, and his revolver gleamed in hand in an instant, while he laid a hand

upon one of the prisoners' shoulders and carried him forward at a run.

The old ranger followed with the other, and for the moment the officer had nothing to do.

"What is this about?" one of the men was demanding of him.

"He's said to be concerned in the Cottrell Case," the officer answered.

"Have you got a warrant?" was the next demand, in something of a belligerent tone.

"No; but—"

"Then, by Harry, Mark Windam don't leave this house!"

One of the men drew a weapon, and the other immediately followed his example.

But, Billy was already half-way down the stairs with Windam, and Roger was not far behind him with the pretending cowboy.

Skinny was behind, and he realized that he had a part to play in the affair that was of no mean importance.

Already the loud voices had brought a crowd from the gaming-room, and Skinny, stopping at the top of the stairs, covered them with his weapons, shouting:

"Hold on, now! Don't one of you attempt to interfere, or the worse for you. I'm one corner of this combination, and I go off mighty easy, so look out how you use your hands."

The policeman had now dodged past him, and descended, and hearing them at the bottom, Skinny retreated backward.

Billy's weapons, and those of the old ranger, too, now covered Skinny's retreat, and the crowd at the top of the landing could do nothing.

As soon as Skinny was at the bottom, the danger was over, for all knew that no one would be likely to fire into the group, and Billy took charge of the matter with his usual grip.

"Here," he said to one of the officers, "you take hold of this fellow along with me, and you," to the other, "take hold there with my old pard. Skinny, you may lead the way or bring up the rear, just as you please."

"I'll bring up the rear," Skinny responded.

"Then we're ready. Open the door."

The door open, they pushed out, and hastened away up the street.

Only a few steps had they gone when they heard the crowd from the den pour out into the street behind them.

"Is there danger that they'll mob us?" asked Billy quickly.

"They might try to run us off," answered the officer who had hold of the man with him. "And, anyhow, I don't know that I'm right in this business."

"Never mind how right you are," cried Billy, sternly. "Rap for assistance! I'm bound to take these fellows in, if it takes a leg, whether you stick to us or not. We know what we're doing. Rap, I say!—d'ye hear?"

The officer stooped and rapped with his club, and it was responded to almost immediately in two or three directions.

Hearing the answers, both policemen whistled, and in a few moments three other officers were with them.

Billy made a hurried explanation, and the three went back toward the saloon while Billy and the others pushed on.

"Where is your Headquarters?" Billy asked.

"Fourteenth and Larimer," was the response.

"We'll steer right for there, then," Billy directed.

He was the master-spirit of the party, and what he directed was done.

Arriving at their destination, they entered the Headquarters in a body, the policemen now with heads erect.

"Hello!" exclaimed the sergeant in charge, "what have we here?"

"Just let me orate, first," answered Billy, stepping to the front. "I want to introduce myself the first thing."

"Well, who are you?"

"Ever hear of Broadway Billy?"

"Broadway Billy? You don't mean to say that's you?"

"You've got it straight, and right from headquarters," Billy assured.

"Well, and what of these prisoners? What is this all about, officer? Who are these men?"

"Hold on!" interrupted Billy, "two can't talk at once, and I've got the floor now. These prisoners, sir, are the men who robbed the Cottrell office, and I can prove it."

The sergeant and everybody else present were amazed at this information.

"You don't mean it?"

"Oh, but I do, though, every time!" Billy assured. "I've got the dead wood on them, I and my pards, here."

"Well, let's hear your story, and we'll see if it's all straight. Do you know these men, officers?"

"Yes; this one is Mark Windam, proprietor of the — Hall; and the other is a fellow named Jake Towser."

"Mark Windam, eh?" in some surprise. "Ungag them, and let them speak for themselves."

This was done, and Windam at once burst forth like a madman.

He denounced as an outrage the indignity that had been heaped upon him, called Billy an ass, and demanded his release at once.

"We'll have to hear the charge," he was reminded. "One moment, young man," to Billy. "Officers, what do you know about it all?"

One answered, telling how Billy had come to them for help, and the manner in which they had found the prisoners.

When he had done, then Billy was allowed to "orate."

He began at the beginning, and told the whole story in a straightforward manner to the end.

He was listened to in silence, except for an occasional sniff or denial from the prisoners, and when he had done it was plain that he had made an impression.

"This young gentleman seems to have a clear case against you, prisoners," spoke the sergeant, then. "You will have to go down, and I'll send for the chief at once."

"It's all an infernal hatched up plot," asseverated Windam.

"Of course it is," echoed Towser.

"And mebby this lump on the back of my head is a hatched up plot, too," the old ranger suggested. And he displayed a swollen spot as big as an egg.

"It looks like a clear case, as I said," repeated the sergeant. "I'm going to hold you, anyhow, till I'm sure about it. Take them down, officers, and I'll telephone at once for the chief."

The prisoners were dragged away, and the sergeant stepped to a 'phone.

"Two prisoners brought in!" he said, when the usual preliminaries had been gone through with. "They are charged with the Cottrell robbery. Better come down at once."

Less than twenty minutes later an important personage entered the room. It was the chief in person.

He heard what had taken place, and drew Broadway Billy aside and engaged him in a conversation that lasted for an hour.

The result was, that when Billy and his "pards" left the office Billy wore the badge of a private officer. He had work to do on the morrow.

"Sweet pertaters!" he cried, slapping Skinny on the back, "ain't this rich! Here we haven't been here long enough to say How d'e do, but see the streak of luck we have tumbled into."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MYSTERY MADE CLEAR.

THE next day was an important one in the career of Broadway Billy.

He had been given authority to go ahead in the Cottrell mystery, since the chief had heard his ideas and approved of them.

There were some things which Billy had desired to know, and which, he thought, had a good deal of bearing upon the case, and he meant to find out if he could.

He was in possession of the only real clew that had been discovered, and it was but justice that he should be given a chance to follow it up, since he had already more than half won the battle.

Things he wanted to know in particular were—

What had taken Mr. Cottrell from his home on that particular night, and what had been going on at the house where he had spent that night.

Billy had the name and address of the man with whom Mr. Cottrell had spent the night, and knew that it was a gentleman against whom no suspicion could attach. He had been a friend of Cottrell's in their younger days.

When Billy set out upon his work that morning he was aware that other detectives were watching him, but he did not let that trouble him.

Roger and Skinny were with him, ready to perform any duty to which he might see fit to assign to them.

His first call was at the Cottrell residence, where he entered alone.

He was shown into a room, where he found Mr. Cottrell pacing up and down the floor, an open letter in his hand.

The man was pale, worn, and now greatly excited.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "What do you want?"

"I am from Police Headquarters," Billy answered. "I am here with news for you, sir."

"News? Ha! what is it?"

"The men who robbed your safe have been arrested."

"Pah! What care I for the robbers? I want the murderer of my child!"

"Well, we are on track of that, too. Hope to have the guilty one before this day closes."

"Then the robbers did not do the deed?"

"No," Billy answered; and immediately asked:

"Do you know this writing, Mr. Cottrell?"

He handed him the letter he had taken from the pocket of Mark Windam.

Mr. Cottrell read it, and an exclamation escaped him. He compared it with the one he held in his hand.

"The writing is the same!" he cried. "This P. H. is the same person who has written to me. Here, see for yourself."

Billy took the other letter and read:

"MARVIN COTTRELL:—

"My revenge has been taken. How do you enjoy it? You little knew that a hand you have taken a hundred times in friendship was the hand of your deadliest foe. So it was. You can never discover who I am, and when next we grasp hands in greeting I shall smile within to think how I have wrung your heart. The murderer of your daughter will never be discovered. YOUR HIDDEN FOE."

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy exclaimed, when he had read it; "this is getting hot, now. Say, do you know any one who answers to the initials P. H.?"

The man repeated the letters several times.

"I know of only one person," he answered, "but it is impossible that she—"

"Who is it?" Billy interrupted impatiently.

"Why, the wife of my friend Hoffham-Philla Hoffham."

"Sweet pertaters and ginger snaps!" Billy cried, as he whirled around on his heel in his old-time boyish way. "This thing is gettin' hotter 'n' hotter, every step. It suits my guess right to a T."

"What are you getting at?"

"Answer a question first. What required you to go to visit Hoffham on that particular night?"

"Why, his wife was going out, and as we were both fond of chess we thought it would be a good plan to have a night together. He invited me to come."

At that moment another personage invaded the room. It was Brandland the detective.

He glanced at Billy sharply, before speaking, and then said:—

"The police have made a discovery, Mr. Cottrell. May I speak out before this young man?"

"He is from the police, and has told me about it, unless you have something very recent, sir."

"The robbers have been taken, and the proof against them is solid. But they deny all knowledge of the murder."

"So this young man has just informed me."

"Them you," to Billy, "are—"

"Broadway Billy of New York city, an' nobody else, sir!"

But why dwell upon it in detail?

Broadway Billy had the right clew, but to follow his steps in carrying it out were to exceed the limit of this narrative. His playing was shrewd, and his judgment unerring.

He was, however, too late in one direction. The guilty one was warned of her danger, and when wanted, she was found dead! She had taken her own life! Perhaps it was as well, for men adjudged her insane.

The guilty one was Philla Hoffham.

She, never suspected by Mr. Cottrell, had been his first wife. Putting away her child, she had afterward married Hoffham under an assumed name.

She was the mother of Mark Windam, though he never knew that. She had done him favors in many ways, but always by letter, and always signing herself simply P. H.

He had come to trust P. H. as his good genius, and whatever she directed him to do he was ever ready to do it. If he needed money, P. H. always supplied it. If he needed other help, he always got it. Yet he could never communicate with her. She seemed to know everything, and yet was invisible to him.

As the wife of Hoffham, she moved in a high circle, and was the friend of Cottrell and his

daughter, seemingly. Over the daughter she seemed to have wonderful influence, and was all the time preparing to strike a deadly blow at the heart of the young lady's father, till at last the time was ripe for her to do so.

She, as confessions, deductions and circumstances went to prove, saw Miss Cottrell prior to the night of the murder, and told her to meet her secretly at a certain place and hour, to participate in a great surprise for her father. At the same time it was she who had made up the arrangement for Mr. Cottrell to visit her husband, to which he unwittingly lent help.

Cottrell had been a frequent visitor there, and she had learned that he carried his keys in the pocket of his light overcoat. She took them, and went to the bank and unlocked doors and safe. There she concealed herself until Windam and Towser had committed the theft. After that she hurried to keep her appointment with Miss Cottrell, and by a plausible story lured her to the bank, and there shot her with her own hand. The weapon was the same one with which she afterward took her own life.

Holding the position she did, she had no thought that suspicion could ever point to her as the guilty one, and so felt secure enough to send the note to the man she had so fiendishly wronged, as shown. And, too, the last writing that ever left her pen was a note to Windam under the old initials. In it she confessed that she was his mother, but would not make her identity known, telling him that he would never bear from her again. The writing of Mrs. Hoffham and the mysterious P. H. were identical in all respects.

It had been quick work. Before the body of the murdered girl was laid to rest, the murderer was cold in death. Providence had been prompt in bringing the truth to light.

Windam and Towser could not be held for the murder, of course, but they were destined to suffer the full penalty for the crimes they had done.

And Broadway Billy—he could not be shown honor enough. His name was upon every lip.

He and his "pards" were the heroes of the hour, and the newspapers were full of the case, giving all credit to them.

Billy bore it all as modestly as possible.

"I s'pose they'll let up when they get tired," he observed to Skinny. "Here we haven't been in Denver long enough to hang up our hats yet, but see the fuss folks are makin' over us. Wouldn't wonder if they made us a present of the whole city yet, my gay and festive dumpling."

"Yet it was more dumb luck than anything else," Skinny declared.

"I don't know about that 'ar," disputed Roger. "It wasn't no dumb luck that sent ye to my rescue in sech a hurry."

And everybody else, too, was evidently opposed to the lads on that question. Billy's record of the past was enough, even had he not done anything at all.

But, they were not done yet. Indeed they had done so much that Denver soon made other work for them.

"We are the people!" cried Billy, when he and his companions finally got back to their room at the humble hotel, and he threw up his hat with all his boyish enthusiasm. "We are still on the wheels, you bet! and going 'round the circle in a dizzy whil-whirl. I feel it in my pistol finger that there's going to be a grand bu'stification in some direction. I've made up my mind, my gay and festive pards, that in this town there's fun enough for more circus than was ever dream'd of in our spellin'-books; and while we are into it we may as well make all the glory and shiners we can. We'll take a breathing-spell for awhile, and see the sights, and then the combination will be open to engagements. What say, pards?"

"I say count me in!" answered Skinny, smilingly.

"An' yer' the same, Billy. Yer uncle sez stay."

And they did.

THE END.

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MISCELLANEOUS.

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